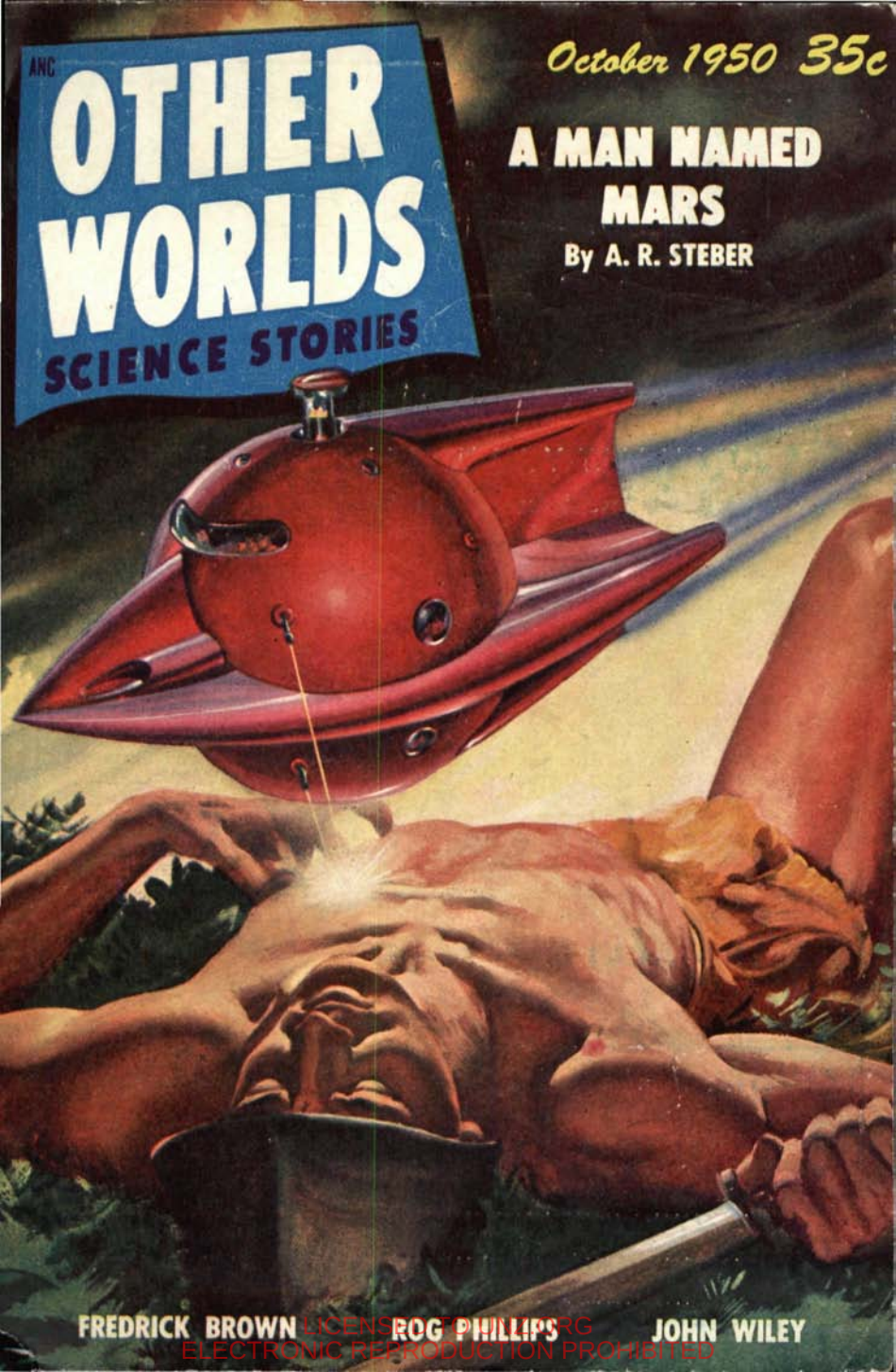

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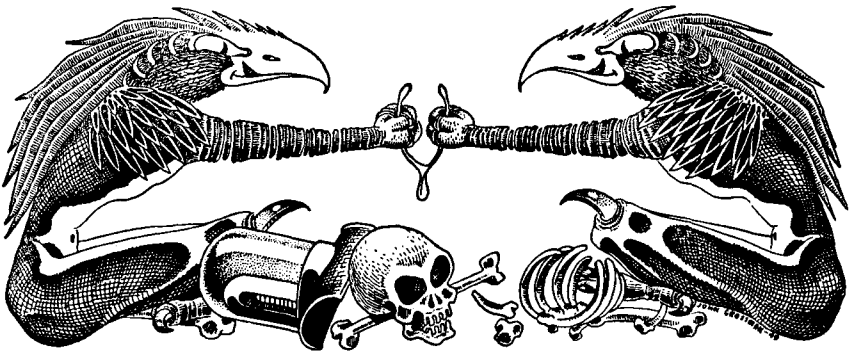

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EDITORIAL

WE'RE writing this editorial from a hospital bed in the St. Francis Hospital, Evanston, Illinois. You've all heard of the guy who braved the perils of the open highway on a long trip to reach home and breathe a big sigh of relief that he made it in one piece—only to slip and fall a few minutes later in the complete safety of his own home? Well that's us. We eluded drunken drivers and the dangers of a driving rainstorm returning from our farm in Northern Wisconsin. Yep, we took that with no trouble at all. But a simple little thing like going downstairs and cleaning the basement (an aftermath of that rainstorm) was too big a task. We slipped —still don't know how it happened— and ended up on the floor with a complicated spinal injury.

That was just about a month ago. Since that time we've been lying in a nice white hospital bed with a lot of sympathetic doctors and nurses hovering over us attentively. What's the score? Well, the medics say they can't help us with surgery (our motor nerves from the waist down just plain refuse to obey orders) and they say it's mostly up to us and old Mother Nature.

Mother Nature has been kind to us in the past. This isn't the first time we've had to have a serious chat with her. And we've always got along pretty well. There was a time when the medics said that even Old Mother Nature couldn't help us. We fooled the medics—and we're going to do it again. Up until a few days ago we couldn't move a muscle in either leg. As we write this editorial we're happy to report that our left leg is thumbing its toes at us and we're working on the right one even now. The hospital staff is pleasantly surprised at our progress, but hell, we knew all along that we'd lick this thing eventually. Why? Very simple. Mind over matter. No other explanation needed. If you don't think so, try it some time. (We hope you never have to!)

So until we get on our feet again, (we figure it will be about three months yet) future issues of OTHER WORLDS and our fine new companion magazine, IMAGINATION, will be edited from Room 201. That is, we'll carry on as much of the work as we can—reading stories, dictating illustration orders, writing editorials, and in general trying to help alleviate the responsibilities of our very capable staff, Bea Mahaffey, and Marge Budwig. While we're on the subject we'd like to put in a word of thanks here for the fine work these two talented editors are doing. They've got what it takes, and that's enough said. Nice going, gals!

Now we'd like to deviate a bit from the conventional editorial. You may have noted we ran a guest editorial in the October issue of IMAGINATION, (if you haven't got your copy yet you better get to your newsdealer right away!) and we'd like to do something along similar lines in this issue of OW. A science-fiction writer was passing through Chicago a few days ago and heard about our acci-

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dent. He dropped up to the hospital to see us and we had a nice chat. We noticed during the shop talk that this writer (whose name will remain anonymous for obvious reasons) had something on his mind that was bothering him. We asked him what it was. And he told us. We were quite impressed with what he had to say, and especially his last remarks which were to the effect that he wished it were possible to get his views, and the views of many writers he had discussed the matter with, in print. We lifted an eyebrow at that and asked him why he thought it was impossible to have his say. He laughed and said that it was preposterous to think that any professional magazine would dare to print the "hot potato" he had on his mind. We asked him then if he'd care to write us his views for inclusion in our current editorial.

After he picked his jaw up from the floor he said he'd feel eternally grateful for the opportunity but felt there must be some catch. We assured him there was none, that OW was a magazine for stf readers—and writers. So here's what this writer had to say:

Ray Palmer has kindly—graciously—consented to let me present my views on the professional side of science and fantasy writing. Frankly, as a writer, I'm boiling mad. In this year of 1950 we find that stf has jumped into the national reading habit with unprecedented popularity. And in keeping with this trend, over twenty magazines are now available on the newsstands. Undoubtedly the readers are happy — because the magazines are selling. And you'd think the writer should be happy—but here's one who isn't.

Sad, but true, a good percentage of these magazines are reprint rags. The publishers advertise boldly and with glowing terms that they're giving the public the "classic greats" of the past. I say that they're a bunch of hypocrites. They don't give a damn about presenting "classics" as such. They're interested only in cutting down on the editorial cost of their magazines, in other words, to increase their profits.

So why should I care? Aren't there enough other magazines to sell to? The cold facts are that these reprint rags cut into the sale of other well-established magazines using only original material. This is only natural. As a result, rates are kept low—the average is still 1c a word, and books are thrown bi-monthly instead of monthly—or they cut their pages to save on production cost. All of these factors hurt the writer who makes his living producing the kind of fiction the fans want to read. I say we're expanding the field right out the window. Unless the reprint rags go the good magazines will be forced to adopt stricter retrenching procedures.

I love science fiction, and would write no other kind—if I have my choice. But I know that writers need solid markets, and they won't have them unless fans stop buying the cheaply produced pulps with reprints that are in existence only for a fast and thicker dollar. Maybe I'm only a voice crying in the Wilderness, but if I cry loud enough perhaps somebody will listen. How about it, fans?

We have no comment to add to this except that in OTHER WORLDS and IMAGINATION only original material is used. Until next issue then . . . *Rap*

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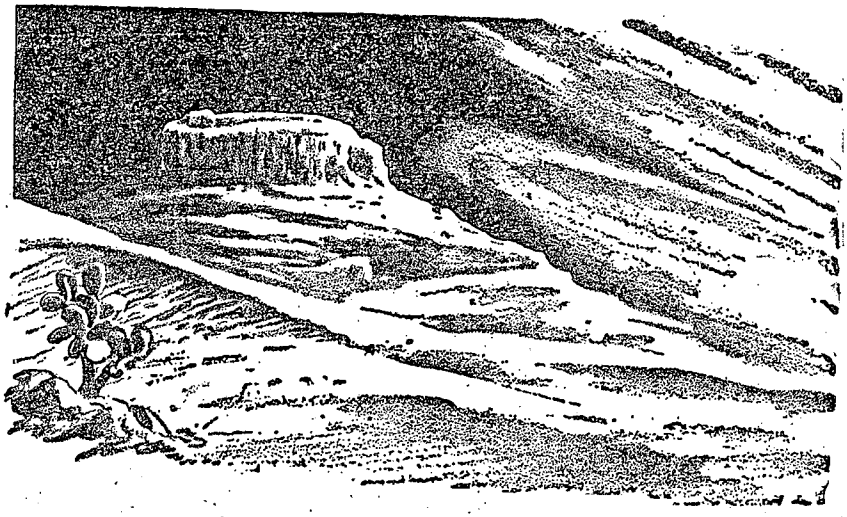

BY THE RULES

By DAVID GORDON

Never interfere with the progress (or lack of it) of the inhabitants of another world, even if interference means you are marooned.

THE jet-black cigar of metal floated in toward the bluish glare of the star, and photo-recorders were clicking. The man at the space cruiser's controls watched carefully, keeping the glowing orb in the crosshairs of the forward plate.

The star showed signs of "going nova." Data must be recorded on the primary activity of the process so that the extent of its effect could be ascertained.

Two thousand kilometers from the ship, a huge sphere of gray material spun through the void. As the ship neared the gray matter, relays deep within its shell clicked, and finally, one last switch slammed into its socket. Then—the bomb exploded.

The glare was not noticeable at any great distance and the detector at Ledor recorded the explosion as a mere pip. To Kiv Stanlor, however, it was no mere pip, as he saw the blinding light only a few milliseconds before the shock touched the ship. The hundred-meter space cruiser spun, twisted frantically as if trying to dodge the awful forces pressing against it, then shot off at an angle. Inside, gauge

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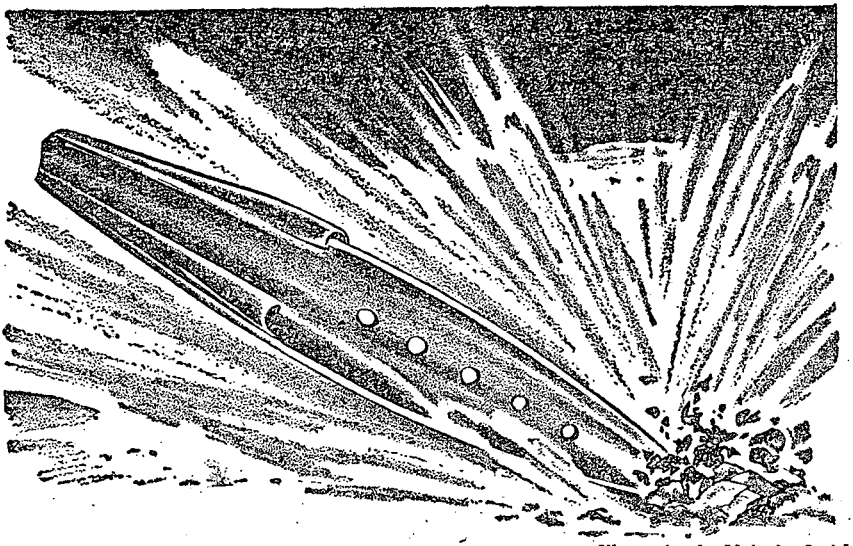

Illustration by Malcolm Smith

needles leaped, slammed against their stops and stayed there. The interstellar drive flashed on at maximum intensity, and its hyperdimensional field flickered on and off thousands of times per second. The ship roared into the blackness of space, the pilot unconscious in its control room—for even a solid vodium hull and several hundred kilometers of space afford only slight protection when forty thousand kilograms of matter become pure raw energy almost instantaneously.

On through the galactic night sped the cruiser, increasing by thousands of light years the tremendous distance between itself and the center of the great disk of stars that was the Galaxy.

Within the hull, the powerful radiation had left only a few of the electronic meters in working order. One of these, labeled "FUEL," dropped steadily as the days passed, then, as the needle touched a red number near the zero mark, a cutoff functioned automatically and the great atomic motors died. The ship coasted on at a slow three-quarters light speed as the hyperdimensional field flicked off.

Kiv Stanlor lifted his head uneasily from the angle made by the wall and the floor, and touched his sticky skull experimentally to assure himself that no part of it had been flattened to fit into the corner. The stickiness, he soon discovered, was blood.

He got to his feet by sheer physical effort, and walked over to the medical locker, opened it, removed a hypo from the rack and shot five cc's of SK-8 into the vein in his arm. He stood there for a moment, allowing

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the powerful restorative to flow through his system. Radiation sickness caused waves of nausea to sweep over him. He sank, exhausted, into the seat before the complex control panel.

The board presented an almost humorous variety of conflicting information. Among other things, the ship was accelerating at eight hundred gravities at a negative speed of six parsecs per hour. Kiv smiled, then busied himself with the equipment that still remained in working order.

He had no way of knowing how long the drive had been off as the chronometer was completely unreliable. The fuel supply had run so low that the drive had cut out automatically, leaving only a few milligrams of it in the converters. There had been no reason to fill the fuel reserve when he left Ledor Base, as he had planned to be gone only a few days at most, and there had been more than enough fuel for that.

He opened the panel to the drive mechanism, and located the short which had caused the energy to bypass the control panel and throw on the drive. Within an hour, the drive was ready to function.

Again dizziness overtook him. He returned to the medical locker, shook a white capsule from one of the vials, placed it on his tongue and swallowed it with a few gulps of water. The dizziness left, and in its stead came almost overpowering weariness. He made his way to the sleeping compartment and sank, exhausted, into its luxurious softness.

More days passed. Kiv knew only of hunger and thirst—occasional food and liter after liter of water were his only wants. During the heavy, lethargic sleep, his body healed; his radiation-weakened tissues rebuilt themselves and grew stronger. He awoke, weak, but whole again.

The cruiser drifted on through space, aimless, blind. Kiv worked against time to repair the screens and vision plates. Without them, the pitifully small bit of fuel in the converter was worse than useless. If the defenseless ship were to be caught in the field of some nearby sun—

Most of the circuits, he found, were only superficially damaged. He experienced only once a sense of complete disaster. As he went through the circuits of the R-beam transceiver, he checked tube after tube. Those that were hopelessly lost, he replaced from the emergency locker. Then he switched power into the circuit. There was no response. That meant—

The crystalline plastoid "brain" had been burned out. There was absolutely no way to contact a patrol base. The "memories" impressed on the tiny fragment of plastic were completely erased, and only they could "remember" the exact location in space of the nearest Galactic base and its position with respect to the ship. Only those memories could aim the communication beam and direct it accurately through thousands of light years of emptiness. There was no way of returning home.

He sat still for a moment, thinking darkly of the years that might stretch ahead, and of the sudden death from the heat of some giant sun. Then, he

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thought, "back to work on the plate circuits."

The screen showed the nearest star to be only a little over five light years distant; an average yellow-white with eleven planets, at least two of which were habitable. The despondency which had floated beneath the surface of his mind washed away. By carefully nursing what little fuel there was left, he could make it.

He pointed the ship toward the star, set her course, and flicked on the drive. Outside the viewplate, the stars began to move majestically by.

In space, nothing can move faster than light. The field of the drive, however, throws a ship into hyperspace, where, although the speed of light is still tops, the spatio-temporal relationships are such that a change of position of a few kilometers in hyperspace means a change of millions of kilometers in normal space. The hyperspace field causes a slight warping of normal space—not much, but enough to cause the field to be inherently unstable for any long period of time. When this effect had been discovered, millions of years before, it seemed to eliminate the hyperspace field as a method of interstellar travel. How could a ship travel in hyperspace if the field which kept it there only held for a few microseconds?

The solution proved to be a better method of interstellar travel than a strictly hyperspace method could possibly be. The field flashes on and stays on only for the microseconds that it is stable, then goes dead just long enough for space to become normal again, thereby returning the ship to normal space. Then, the field again flickers on. The succession is repeated thousands of times per second. The ship's velocity remains constant at three-quarters light speed, but in the short span of time the field is on, the ship moves millions of times farther than it does during the equally short time that it is off. Since hyperspace is completely empty of matter, the plates are totally black part of the time; the rest of the time, they reflect the stars of normal space. Thus, these jumps, which occupy as little time as they do, seem to cause the stars in the plates to move smoothly, the nearer ones moving more rapidly than the more distant ones.

Kiv watched the plate before him. The yellow star was growing visibly brighter. He should make it in about forty minutes at the speed he was moving.

Assuring himself that the course was set, he leaned back in the control chair. One thing puzzled him. From what infernal section of space had that son of a nameless bomb come? The sector of the galaxy where he had found the thing was fairly well frequented by Patrol ships; as a matter of fact, there was a Patrol base at Kelmar IV, only eighteen light-years from where he had encountered the spacemine. It suddenly dawned on him why the base had been located there. It was a result of the Kelmar Revolt of four hundred thousand years before. The revolt had been instigated by a race of intelligent beings, members of a highly unstable civilization, which had been pushed

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upwards too rapidly by the coming of the Galactics. They used the science forced upon them in a feeble attempt to control the Galaxy.

It was because of the Kelmar Uprising that the Galactic government had made the "No Contact Rule": *No Galactic shall, through any means, make himself known to, or give aid or hindrance to, any civilization below the third level of progression.* The rule carried no penalty for disobedience, nor did it need to be enforced. No Galactic would think of disobeying a perfectly just and justified rule, which was as much for the welfare of such low-leveled civilizations as for the welfare of his own.

Placed there by the defending forces of Kelmar, the bomb which Kiv had hit evidently had been floating in an orbit around Kelmar itself, held there for millenia by the star's tenuous gravitational field, waiting to explode when a ship came near.

Satisfied with his own explanation Kiv looked back at the growing orb in the forward plate.

Minutes later, its fuel exhausted by the last-minute braking, the cruiser screamed into the atmosphere and buried itself deep into the surface of the third planet of the now-huge yellow star. Braced for this shock, definitely weaker than that of the bomb, Stanlor grasped the rear of the control seat as the deceleration tried to force him to the forward control panel. Outside, the bedrock of the planet roared in torture as the incredibly hard vodium hull ground it to powder. Then, abruptly, motion ceased.

The physical shock of landing was replaced suddenly by the mental shock of alien thoughts—unshielded! The planet was inhabited!

A quick analysis brought further realization that the thoughts were not beamed, but broadcast indiscriminately; therefore, the civilization must, of necessity, be no higher than the second level of progression.

He searched rapidly through the maze of his conflicting thoughts. Was his presence known?

Nearby, he detected a few wisps of: ". . . falling star! Big one, too, and . . ."—". . . probably hit somewhere out in the desert . . ." and one, ". . . Money, money, money—oh, RATS! Too late . . ." Otherwise, nothing.

So far as they knew, his ship had been nothing more than a meteor—the situation offered hope and at the same time killed it. With a civilization of fairly intelligent beings, it was possible to build the equipment necessary to synthesize the fuel he needed. However, he could not tell them of his need, nor even help them make his precious fuel by undercover action, for that would violate the "No Contact" rule.

Odd, he thought, that Rule 1434 of the Galactic Code should be forcibly brought to his mind twice in this situation. The reason for its instigation had caused his present plight, and the rule itself prevented his escape. Still, there must be some way—

First, he must conceal the whereabouts of the ship. If reports of the "meteor" reached the right persons, some sort of scientific group might

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decide to investigate.

The hot Arizona sun made the road look like glass shimmering just ahead of the speeding car. Lou Scott squinted his eyes at the glaring ribbon and hummed softly to himself.

"California here I come — Hmm hmmm hmm hmm—started from—"

He reached up with one hand and lowered the sunshade a little more to protect his eyes from the direct rays of the setting sun.

"Ought to make it to San Diego by ten," he thought. Then for a bath, a bed, and a good night's sleep. Good thing I thought to bring an extra suit —this one looks as though I'd slept in it."

His gaze shifted suddenly to the figure ahead, standing at the side of the road.

Was he hitch-hiking? The figure presented a thumb.

The powerful Buick slowed and stopped a few feet from the bronzed man standing by the road.

"Ride, buddy?" inquired Lou, "I'm headed for Dago."

"Thanks, I thought I'd never get a ride."

The hitch-hiker opened the rear door and got in, closing it behind him. Lou put the car in gear, and drove on down the highway. His lack of attention to the man in the back seat was abnormal. He hadn't even noticed that the man had been nearly naked.

Kiv Stanlor absorbed in minute detail the mind of the man in the driver's seat. He noticed his manner of dress and appearance and decided that hypnotism was insufficient for purposes of clothing. He leaned back in the seat, opened the suitcase sitting beside him and began to rummage through it.

Lou Scott walked into a San Diego hotel, still humming.

"Now for that bath and bed. I wish I'd thought to bring an extra suit. The one I'm wearing looks like it's been slept in."

That night, a stratoliner took off for New York with a passenger who had failed to procure a ticket, but no one seemed to care.

Kiv Stanlor leaned back in the chair and mulled over the facts he had acquired. Outside the window of the hotel room the evening traffic of Manhattan muttered, thirty stories below. Mentally, too, it muttered. From it, the random products of thousands of minds could be heard.

The knowledge that had come to him through his mental prying and visual observation built up a picture that seemed more and more ridiculous. This society was built on a system of seeming paradoxes. For one thing, they had discovered and were using a crude form of atomic energy, which indicated a mathematical ability approaching that of most fourth stage civilizations. Yet, their mental and moral discipline was practically nil. They used only ten per cent of their brains. They knew more of their environment than they knew of themselves, and the systems of government they had evolved were almost fantastic.

All in all, it boiled down to one

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thing: Material knowledge — high fourth or low fifth stage development. Mental knowledge—low second stage development. The conclusion was inevitable, and impossible, for it violated all psychohistorical precedent. It was totally illogical that any civilization could so develop. And he thought wryly, at the rate they seemed to be going, they wouldn't develop much further. They had perfected a means of killing each other and didn't seem to be able to keep themselves from doing it. It made a good problem to think about, but what could he do about it if he solved the problem? He was unable to help them even to get the fuel he badly needed, much less do so for purely altruistic reasons. Even if he could justify giving them the ability and knowledge necessary to construct the apparatus that was needed, the result would probably be the destruction of the entire race. Morally, they weren't ready, even for the things they had, much less the things he could give them.

His duty to his race required two things: (1) That he return to Ledor as soon as possible with the data he had been sent to get, and (2) that he obey the Galactic Law.

By the time his absence was discovered, the primary symptoms of the embryonic nova would have disappeared, and only through them could the extent of its damage and its exact date of detonation be determined. It would be about eighty years before the star was due to explode, but—could he get back in time?

He could, of course, get the isotope he needed by restoring the inert ninety per cent of the race's brains to use and, in time, teach them the technology required to make it. Aside from the fact that knowledge of the Galactics at this point in their history would give this race an incurable inferiority complex, he would be breaking the "No Contact" rule. *A thing he could not, absolutely could not, do!*

Still, somewhere on the fringe of consciousness, the answer hung, elusive, shadowy, unreachable as yet—

During the months that followed, Kiv Stanlor delved further into the history and psychology of the race. Piece by piece, seemingly irrelevant facts fitted into odd corners of the still incomplete problem. He absorbed the histories, the legends, and the myths of the race, and in them he found minute bits of information that built up into a pattern. It required nearly a year of searching and discarding of false knowledge before the solution evolved itself, before the facts built themselves into a picture of truth that could not be discarded. On that day, Kiv set to work in confidence. He didn't rush blindly into his planned course of action. He had discarded carefully and with painstaking consideration everything which came to light that seemed to disprove his final hypothesis. Biological similarity?—Parallel evolution on habitable planets was not uncommon. Besides, the nearest similar animal was just enough different to account for such evolutionary aberrations. Unlike nearly every other case of its kind, only one genus had evolved.

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With equally indisputable logic he discarded the other objections which he himself brought forth. If the true facts fit logically into a lie, are the facts false?—or the lie, true?

Viewpoint makes a lot of difference. From one position, a thing may look totally incomprehensible, and from another, ridiculously simple. The Galaxy is lens-shaped, but from Earth, it looks like nothing more or less than a curved band of foggy whiteness. One has to get outside it to see what it really looks like. Problems like these require the opposite viewpoint. One has to get *inside* them to see what they really look like. When Kiv Stanlor got "inside" his problem, the paradoxes resolved themselves into logical pieces of a beautifully logical pattern. With this pattern in mind, Kiv began a campaign that had odd effects on the human race. He had known from the first that he was incapable of hypnotizing everyone with whom he must come in contact, therefore, he must be careful and subtle in his actions.

His first move took him back to the buried spaceship. The bit of crystalline plastoid in the useless R-beam was, in effect, a new-born primitive brain, erased of all memories by the radiation which had struck it. On this brain Stanlor impressed a certain complex web of thought impressions —a web which would act as a key.

The bit of "brain" was incorporated in a circuit somewhat similar to the R-beam, in that it broadcast on the unimaginably tiny wavelength of thought, which is propagated at speeds so great as to be almost instantaneous. When he powered the circuit, the apparatus gave out a soft, warm hum. All over the Earth, the blocked-off ninety per cent of the human brain became ready for use. The effects were not immediately apparent, as the new clarity of thinking seemed so natural that the average man didn't even notice it.

"From a tiny snowball, the makings of an avalanche began to manifest themselves."

Kiv Stanlor began to plot Phase 2 of his plan.

Deep beneath the mountains of New Mexico, a black-haired young man in the gray coverall uniform of the Federation Research Service walked through well-lighted, lead-lined corridors. He turned into a niche in the side of the corridor and stood, as the scanner recorded his eye cone patterns, x-rayed his six feet of strong brown body, and checked his bone structure against previous photographs—a pause—click! The door before him slid open smoothly.

"I think I've got it, Keith," he said to the man behind the desk. "If I do, we have an atomic fuel which will take us right out of the stratosphere. The moon will only be a jumping-off spot."

Keith smiled, running a hand through black hair.

"Fine. Let's see the reports."

The other man handed him the sheaf of papers he carried in his hand.

"There's the whole thing. Johnson's in the mechanics' lab now, working out a motor that'll take the stuff. He says it'll be four to six months before

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we get the bugs worked out."

Keith Sorensen took the sheaf, looked through it. "Okay, I'll check 'em. Where'll you be about five, Craig?"

The door of Craig Stanley's office clicked smoothly open, permitting Keith Sorensen to enter.

"This looks better, Craig. That last batch would have tossed the whole bunch of us right out of here—and about half of New Mexico with us."

Craig Stanley looked at Keith and grinned sheepishly.

"If you hadn't found the error in calculation, we'd have tried it too. On the surface, it looked good—too good."

"Everybody can make little mistakes. Look at Einstein; when he finally got the Universal Field Theory down pat, he found a slip-up in some of his previous work that might have been important sometime."

"Yeah, but my—"

"Forget it! Say, it's nearly six—let's go down to George's for dinner and take on a couple afterward. I want to double check this stuff, and I want to do it over a Martini."

"You're on!"

Red O'Hanahan pushed his heavily muscled body over in his booth to make way for the two men.

"Keith! Craig! Sit down! What Christmas present did you get that brings such a rosy glow to your faces?"

They sat down, Keith next to the big Irishman, Craig across the table from him.

"The glow," said Keith stretching himself to his full, lithe six feet, "comes not from the Christmas cheer you suggest. Actually—" he peered conspiringly over his shoulder, and lowered his voice to a whisper "—actually, it's caused by atomic power!"

"Oh?" Red's face was a perfect blank. "You mean you've found a way to make venusium edible?"

Craig leaned across the table. "No, but we've found a way to take you clear out of this world."

"Aha! So far, the two best ways I've found are: (a) enough plutonium in one place, and (b) enough alcohol in the right place. Have you found a better method?"

"It's nothing, really," murmured Keith calmly. "Craig's just found the fuel for atomic rockets."

Red put out a freckled hand for his drink, did a double take and said, "Hey! You aren't kidding, are you? Well, I'll be—" He turned toward the bar. "George! Bring over three of 'em—double!"

As the bartender called out the order, Red looked back at Craig.

"So we've finally got it. When do we leave?"

"Johnson says it'll be four to six months before he'll have all the bugs out of the motors—May or June, somewhere in there. Then we'll have to put the thing in a ship."

Keith looked at Red, caution in his eyes. "Naturally, not a word of this to anyone. We've got to make a report to the Federation Government, first. Even then, the Co-ordinator might ask us to keep it quiet."

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"Hell, I don't get leave for another eight months, how could I get word out of this hole in the ground?"

George appeared, bringing with him a tray full of Martinis.

"Workin' hard, boys?" He set the glasses on the table. "How's everything comin'?"

"George," observed Keith, "the plant personnel would be unable to think at all, except for your kind administrations."

George smiled indulgently. Atomic engineers were a screwy bunch. He wiped the table carefully, picked up the change they had laid down for the drinks and walked back to the bar.

"You know," Red said, "it's amazing, the things that have happened in the past twenty years. Atomic power—world peace—formation of the Terran Federation—things we wouldn't have thought possible when we were kids. Now, in 1967, we're ready to make it to the moon in person."

"Oh, really not too amazing." Keith stuck a cigarette in his mouth, offered one to Craig. "Technical knowledge has been accelerating for the past three hundred years. As for the rocket, we knew it was coming, ever since the United States Army sent one there in '55. All we needed was a way to get enough energy in a small enough space so that we could make it without the terrific acceleration that the use of a chemical fuel gave."

Red frowned, flicked a bit of dust from the gold Safety Engineering emblem on the lapel of his gray gabardine uniform and said: "Technological advancement is a matter of discovery, and ingenuity puts them together to make a gadget that's worthwhile and useful. Discovery of a principle requires hard work and knowledge, unless it is found by accident, as, I'll admit, a few have been. But ingenuity rests entirely on the clarity of thinking in the human mind. It seems to me that human brainpower has increased considerably lately. I could quote thousands of examples. One that hits me in particular is the sudden clarity with which the human race saw the entire world problem fifteen years ago and every nation on Earth—without a dissenting vote, mind you—agreed to the formation of the Federation. Cannibalism has completely disappeared from the practices of our more primitive peoples, since they saw there was no reason for its continuation, and much reason for its discontinuation. Twenty years ago, a Negro couldn't get a job worth anything anywhere in the United States. Now, the Representative of the United States is a Negro — elected simply because the citizens realized he was the best man for the job.

"The point I'm driving at is this: Somehow we've all become a darn sight more clear in our thinking in the last ten years—and a lot more idealistic. Why?"

Sorensen poured his drink down his throat thirstily before answering.

"I've been thinking on that, too. Look—I was a sophomore at Tech before I had the background for calculus. Now, in the new school system, the kids are breezing right through it

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at the age of fourteen; by the time they're twenty, tensor calculus is a snap. I can't see why it seemed so hard when I took it as it seems so perfectly simple now." He looked at Craig who was staring intently at his own glass, a speculative smile on his lips. "What do you think about it, Craig?"

Craig looked up from his study. "I think its really pretty obvious. We've simply learned to use our potentialities. All along, we've had the ability to do these things—we just didn't use that ability.

"At the turn of the last century, the cathode tube was well enough on the way to have made television possible at the same time radio became common. The potentialities were there—we simply didn't use 'em. The same thing was true of the atomic piles of twenty years ago. With the pile they had at Oak Ridge, they could have built the fuel we have been working on. Oh, it would have been a lot more dangerous, sure, but the point I'm driving at is that they had the potentialities, and didn't have the foggiest idea of how they could be used.

"It's the same way with our mental possibilities—we just learned how to use the possibilities, finally, after a couple of thousands of generations of being on the wrong track." He smiled then, "At least that's the way I had it figured."

The Irishman signalled once more to George, and turned back towards his companions.

"That sounds good, Stanley, but —"

Keith cut him off with a wave. "Look, chums, it is time I looked these"—he lifted the papers—"over again, and I wanted to do it over a drink. Do you mind?"

O'Hanahan and Stanley nodded solemnly. "Yes, Mighty One," they murmured reverently. "May we be of assistance?"

Keith pretended to glare, good humoredly, and pulled a pencil from a pocket in his comfortable gray coveralls. "Yeah—you can shut up!"

Kiv Stanlor inspected the minds of his companions and smiled inwardly. As yet, the fuel wasn't good enough —— but with eighty Earth years to spare, he could afford to wait.

The first passenger-carrying ship to Luna lifted from the launching pit in New Mexico February 3, 1968, and returned safely seven weeks later. By 1970, the caverns beneath Tycho crater housed over eight thousand people, and, by 1973, every atomic plant on Earth had been neutralized and dismantled. The Terran Federation Council had forbidden the erection of any atomic plants whatsoever on Earth itself. Beneath Tycho, eight separate plants were busily at work pouring out the unstable isotope that was powering man's exploration into space.

George McGee pressed the button that lighted up his new full-vision sign.

Red O'Hanahan looked up at the whiteness. "'Nearest Bar Within 236,000 Miles'" he read. "Clever,

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George, clever."

George leaned back in the chair behind the bar and looked up at the sign. "Thanks, chum, but I really can't take credit for it. I got the idea out of a book I picked up in the library—science-fiction, written about thirty years ago by some fellow named Smith."

"Mmmhmm—My dad used to read that stuff when I was a kid. He still likes it, I guess."

Keith Sorensen called across the room. "Mix us a couple of Lunar Loops, George. What's this about your dad?" He looked at Red as he walked toward the bar.

George turned toward the robot behind him. "Get that, O'Rourke?"

"Yes sir, two ell-ell's coming up," came the voice from the speaker.

From behind the wall came a whirr of sound. A panel behind George slid open and two tall glasses filled with frothing liquid slid into view.

Red took them from George—handed one to Keith. "I was just saying that my dad likes science-fiction."

"Red, m'lad, do you mean to say you *don't* like it?"

"I dunno, I never read any."

"Try it sometime. Imaginative fiction can give you some darn good ideas on what the human race would like to have. Take O'Rourke, for instance. Robots were mentioned as far back as fifty or sixty years ago—as a matter of fact, it was a science-fiction writer who invented the word. He wrote a play about them.

"Of course, the classical idea of a robot was all wrong. It kept insisting on humanoid construction, while O'Rourke fills the whole back room. He's a highly complex automatic mixing machine with a selective controlling brain. The same way with the robots in the nucleonics labs. Their only function is to obey intelligently the orders they're given on operating their own organs, that's all."

O'Rourke's voice came from the wall. "Meanin' no harm, sir, but it's glad I am that I'm not built like you—t'would be no end of trouble to have to think about moving around and mixin' drinks at the same time." The equivalent of a chuckle issued from the speaker.

"You're probably lucky at that," laughed Red. "And that Irish brogue built into you is better than my granddad's."

"Thank you, sir. And may I mix you another?"

"In honor of my new sign, they're on the house, boys," said George.

"Fine," agreed Red, "but this time, O'Rourke, make it a Manhattan."

"Same here," said Keith.

Again O'Rourke whirred. The panel opened, disclosing a pair of crystal-clear plastic containers filled with amber liquid.

"All I have to do to find you guys is to walk into the nearest bar," Craig's voice came from the doorway.

Keith gestured laconically at the sign. "Naturally—this is the nearest bar you could walk to."

Craig glanced up, read the sign. "Hmm—not exactly accurate, but it'll do for an approximation."

Red grimaced. "There goes old pre-

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cision brain—'Not exactly accurate' sez he. What do you want done? You want it listed to the nearest yard at apogee and perigee?"

"It might be a good idea, then you might know how far you are from home."

"Yuk! O'Rourke, make this yap a Manhattan so he'll shut up."

Keith glanced down at his drink and admired the little glints of amber light that were refracted from the fluorescents. "How are we coming in the fuel tests, Craig—found anything new?"

"Well, yes and no. The stuff I told you about yesterday seems to be a little better, but not much. Of course, what I'd like to find is some stuff that would really give us high power without so much gamma and wasted neutrons."

Red looked philosophically at the glowing sign in the ceiling.

"Craig, you asked me the other day what I thought the perfect energy supply would be. I've been thinking about it. 'Perfect,' of course, implies a lot, and I don't think you could imagine a perfect one, but here's one that just about fills the bill:

"It would have to be as compact as possible. It would give you energy in the form you wanted it, with little or no leakage as gamma rays or neutrons, which are not only useless but dangerous. It would have to be easily controlled, so you could shut it off or turn it on at will. On top of that, it would have to be cheap and fairly easy to manufacture. How's that?"

"That's about what I had in mind. Keith, you're the mathematician; is such a fuel probable?"

Keith's brow furrowed for a moment. "Probably even that is a little too perfect, but I have no doubt that it would be at least theoretically possible to synthesize some sort of stuff that would do almost that."

"I'm glad to hear it. I've been toying with the idea of a near-perfect energy supply for some time now, and just lately I've been toying with what I think is the method of doing it. The idea came a few months back, and I believe I'm on a good lead, anyway."

Keith looked up at the fluorescents. "There's one more thing you'd need for perfection—total mass conversion."

"Sure," said Craig, "obviously. Why?"

"Funny thing. I've been working on a little thing that would give almost total conversion if you could find the right stuff to work it on."

Craig sat bolt upright. "WHAT?"

"Wait a second," said Keith, "I didn't say it could be controlled—and I didn't say the stuff would be possible to make—but it sounds okay on paper anyway."

"Could I—I mean—would you let me look over your figures?"

"Sure. Come on down to the office."

The smooth dropping of the elevator brought them into a lead-lined corridor that greatly resembled the one back on Earth. That is, except for the softly glowing dots from the Bronson field tubes which dotted the sides, generating the neutron-stopping

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field that protected human life against intense radioactivity that even lead could only weaken a little. The only purpose of the walls was to allow the inhabitants enough time to escape if the field should happen to collapse.

They entered a door marked:

KEITH L. SORENSEN
HEAD
DEPARTMENT OF MATHEMATICS

Keith pulled open a desk drawer and withdrew a notebook filled with tight-packed rows of little symbols. Craig and Red grabbed it eagerly and sat together on the couch on the other side of the desk from Sorensen.

After a few minutes, the Irishman leaped up excitedly.

"Keith, I'm not an expert on protection for nothing. I've been useless around here long enough! The Bronson Field protects you from a neutron bombardment that would kill you in about five minutes if you were exposed to it. Even lead won't protect you because in about twenty minutes to half an hour, it would become too radioactive to be of any use.

"Now, you know how a Bronson field works—a paragravitic effect that stops a neutron cold in its tracks, then drifts off into space, harmlessly, too slow even to bother Pu-239. With a little modification, the field could, I believe, be arranged simply to repel neutrons, tossing them right back into the reaction instead of letting them escape. In addition, we could collapse the neutrons so that they would be completely converted. I think if Craig can make the stuff you have figured out, I can, with your help fix up a good method of controlling it and converting it almost one hundred percent!"

During O'Hanahan's outbreak Craig had been studying the notebook, hearing the Irishman with only half an ear. Finally, he glanced up.

"There's only one trouble — this would give you something that I for one wouldn't know how to control, or what to do with—pure atomic energy!—not heat, or electromagnetic waves, or anything we'd be able to control for sure, but pure binding energy without anything to bind!"

Red looked puzzled. "I don't get it. What—"

"Look, I'll give you a weak analogy: Gravity is the stuff that holds matter together. It's the atomic binding force, so to speak, rather than the nuclear binding force I'm talking about. Now—would you know exactly what to do with pure gravity?"

"Mmm—I see. There'd be a lot of nice things you could think about, but you don't have any notion at all how matterless gravity would work—right?"

"You've got the idea. It's something we won't know what to do with until we have it—and even then we might not succeed."

Kiv thought: "Somehow, they must realize the importance of this. Somehow, I must—"

His mind flashed out, penetrating the consciousness of the other two, forging their thoughts together into cohesive mental action.

Keith Sorensen looked up from his desk, his dark eyes flashing.

"Due to the difference in our train-

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ing, not any one of us can find the answer to this. Not one of us can realize, in any short time, the potentialities of this thing. Therefore, I suggest that each of us work on it in his own field, working out the whole thing to his own satisfaction. Only in that way can we ever realize what we are driving at."

The others looked at him. Craig spoke.

"You're right. Red, you work on that force field and I'll figure out as best I can the fuel that we need. If it isn't impossible, we'll find it."

Kiv relaxed mentally. That should do it. They had the completed problem in their grasp—it was all there. If they would only correlate it, he would be home in a short time.

"So far," said Sorensen, "the theory is perfect. If everything checks, we've got it."

The three men walked into the dimly lighted corridor that led to the elevator. The armed guard stopped them.

"Sorry, sir," he spoke to Keith, "the Council has issued an order that a triple alert be enforced. There seems to be an emergency because of the Reversists on Earth. You will have to submit to complete ID processes."

Kiv was aware of the potentialities of the guard's statement. The Reversists were a group of violent reactionaries who had never accepted the Terran Federation. They had not responded entirely to his mind treatment and were violently nationalistic. For an instant, shock stole into his system. Was it possible that interbreeding had taken place to some slight extent in the far distant past? Logic came forward. Interbreeding had, undoubtedly taken place—but the Law of Primitive Survival would take care of that possibility. Therefore, the rebellion was due to some other cause.

Mutation. He hoped there was not too much of it—

The ID process was thorough. X-rays, eye-cone patterns, fingerprints, skin texture, all the normal tests, and some that were not. Evidently security was taking no chances.

That finished, they proceeded into the elevator, and dropped four thousand feet through the Lunar crust. The elevator slowed, and stopped.

Craig Stanley said: "If only it works. If it doesn't—"

He pressed the combination of the intricate lock before him. They entered the corridor that led through the massive shielding that protected the nucleonics lab. Here, the output of the Bronson barrier tubes was not a dim glow—it was a brilliant glare that lighted the whole hallway. They entered the control room.

"Well," Craig said, "this is it."

He pressed the button that actuated the vision screen. Before him the screen glowed with varicolored lights, then the scene clarified. The speaker in the wall clicked into action, and the robot voice spoke:

"Yes, sir?"

"Get ready for the experiment we carried out yesterday, Alphaten."

"Yes, sir." Relays began to function. Through the screen, the three

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men could see the metalloid arms moving and the belts shifting the positions of various pieces of apparatus.

"Red." Craig's voice was clipped, indicative.

The Irishman walked over to the newly-built control panel and activated the controlling field. The experiment proceeded.

Thirty minutes later, the three pairs of eyes were focused on the screen. Two needle points neared each other. On them were microscopic bits of carefully weighed metal. The needle points stopped. A switch moved forward, and the entire screen was diffused with a bluish light. Suddenly, a violent shock made the scene in the screen shimmer.

A few minutes later, the robot's voice came from the speaker:

"I have calculated the weight loss of the material, sir, and within experimental error, the mass conversion was almost eighty-six percent total. Might I add my congratulations, sir? The control was almost perfect."

Craig leaned back in the control chair. "Control almost perfect. Fine, but what can we do with it? Eighty-six percent of the stuff vanished and where did it go? There was undoubtedly a lot of energy released in there, but what did it do, why did only a part of it register on the screens and meters? All we seemed to get was a lot of heat."

Keith looked thoughtful for a moment, then smiled. "At least we're better off than Hertz—we know that we're looking for a certain amount of energy—he wasn't sure *what* he was looking for."

Red ran a freckled hand through his fiery mop and said, "Well, Craig, I guess we'd better make up a batch of it and work on this until we find out what we're working with. We'd better beetle it down to the doctor right away — this stuff probably doesn't pay much attention to lead or Bronson fields."

"Sir," broke in the robot's voice, "shall I release the pressure?"

"Pressure?" asked Craig blankly.

"Yes, sir, according to my Sensitives, there is now a pressure in the laboratory of two thousand atmospheres."

"Ye Gods!" He leaped to the control board. All the meters were normal except the one from which he had expected little information. The pressure gauge needle was jammed tight against the stop.

"Alphaten, carefully open the release valve to the surface—just a fraction of a millimeter."

"Yes, sir." There was a short pause. "Sir, the flow meters show nothing coming through the valve. Shall I open it a little wider?"

"Go ahead."

Another pause. "No response, sir."

"Check your Sensitives. Are you sure there's nothing wrong with them?

When the robot spoke again, there was as much surprise in its voice as it was capable of registering:

"Sir, my pressure Sensitive is overloaded. Evidently there was a great deal of pressure for a very short

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length of time, then, it vanished."

There was a barely audible series of clicks, then:

"I have repaired the Sensitive, sir. There is no pressure registering in the laboratory."

Craig sat back down at the seat before the board. "Alphaten, let's try that again—and this time, watch the pressure."

Four hours later, the three men were again seated in a booth in George's.

Craig was speaking: "It was really just about what you could expect. The binding energy is pure force. What could you expect it to release but pure force? The other meters didn't register because they were meant to measure radiation, electrical energy, temperature, and so forth. The pressure gauge is a hypersensitive barometer used for measuring the tiny variations in pressure that occur during some nucleonic reactions. Therefore, the force would act on it."

"You mean," Red interrupted, "that what we have is just plain push without anything pushing?"

Keith laughed. "Something like that, though I rather imagine it's a little more complicated."

Craig went on. "What it seems to be is simply an inversion of gravitation. Instead of pulling things toward it, the source of the effect pushes all matter away. It seems to dissipate itself as heat.

The Galactic smiled, mentally. The comparison was poor, and in due time they would find that it was not one of the properties of the matter itself that caused the "push," but the manner of converting the matter. The thought of what might have happened if the other two had not accepted the ideas implanted in their brains was really not very funny. If they had used the more simple method—

The next step must be carried out with the greatest of finesse.

"Craig," said Sorensen, "how long would it take to make several kilograms of the stuff?"

The next two weeks of busied activity were brought to a sudden stop when a breach in one of the walls of the lab rendered it useless. Something had gone wrong with the controls—what, they never established — and the sudden burst of the "pure force" had ruptured one of the entrance ports, the weakest spots in the walls of the nucleonics lab. Stanley and Sorensen, clad in Bronson tube protective space suits, were the first to enter the airless lab after the accident.

"It looks like someone just pushed at it." Keith pointed at the crack.

"Or hit it with a sledgehammer," agreed Craig.

"The amount of the force depends on the rate of release and the distance from the object against which the force is directed," Keith mused. "It took only a little bit of the stuff to slug that hole in the wall—a few micrograms."

Craig stepped around the wrecked

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door and went into the airless corridor toward the air lock. As Sorensen started to follow, he felt behind him the silent scream of metal on metal. He turned in time to see a force-weakened metal beam crash down on his skull.

Red spun a half-smoked cigarette into the receptacle.

"They ought to be through soon," he said.

Craig nodded. "Odd request. I wonder why he wanted to be buried on Earth?"

"Don't know. He had a ranch somewhere in Arizona—said he wanted to rest in the land he loved."

The door panel to their right slid open, admitting an elderly man in the green gabardine of the medical service. He stood a moment, then:

"You may see him now, if you like."

They followed him into the pastel green of the medical operating room. Before them, sealed in a clear plastiglas case lay the frozen body of Keith Sorensen.

As they looked, they grew aware that the physician was speaking:

"—no need for an autopsy. The blow on the head was a glancing one, and no bones were broken. However, his medical record shows a heart condition that might very easily have killed him. The x-rays showed that his heart had very definitely been deformed—since birth, probably—and had ruptured. This, combined with the obvious symptoms of shock, was enough evidence to make out the death certificate. His request that his body be frozen and shipped back to Terra, though odd, is not unreasonable, and, due to his fine record and the marvelous work he has done, the Federal Government has granted that request. Oh, by the way—" he dropped his professional air and smiled sympathetically at the two men "—another of the requests that were in the envelope delivered to me upon his death was that four months after his death you are to open this box."

He stepped over to the table on which Keith's belongings lay, and picked up a small metal cube about six centimeters to the side.

"According to his letter—which, by the way, has been probated as a will—the box contains a time lock which will unlock four months after it has been set. He set it each morning at eight, therefore the box will open at eight o'clock on the morning of September 3. He has stipulated that there are to be no spectators except Patrick O'Hanahan and Craig Stanley, and that they are to lock themselves in one of their bedrooms at that time. When that time arrives, a stud will automatically protrude from the side of the box. To open the box, depress the stud. If, however, the stud is not pressed within an hour—by nine o'clock—the contents of the box will be automatically destroyed, as they will be if the box is tampered with at any time before that.

"Gentlemen, the box is yours."

Craig accepted the small metal cube and examined it minutely—there was not a seam of any kind on

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it. On one side, which Craig took to be the top, the initials KLS were set in a silvery metal, differing from the bluish-gray of the main body of the block.

"It appears to be quite solid," he observed.

Blackness. Cold, heavy, blackness —formless and without sensation— then, a swirling, as of a tenuous, faintly luminous gas. For an eternity the tenuous nothingness swirled, sluggishly at first, then more rapidly, until finally it burst, and the blackness returned. This blackness was not like the other; it seemed, somehow—lighter; not heavy, smothering, as it had been a hundred million centuries before. Then, slowly, came awareness. At first, it was only a driving determination, a determination to do—*something!* What? Wake up. Wake up! *Wake up!* Then it came loudly, screamingly, blasting across neural passageways, roaring through his brain: WAKE UP! — and he did.

A complete neuronic check-up showed his body to be in almost perfect condition. The long refrigeration had slowed it down to an almost static condition, but otherwise—perfect.

First, he thought, *the heart. Have to work fast now. Getting warm.* Stimulated by carefully sent motor impulses, the great double-walled heart began to throb, pushing the viscous blood through stiffened arteries. Then, the tiny energies of carbohydrate oxidation began to warm and feed him. After a time, he charged his body with the powerful life energies stored in his mighty brain—and the magnificent biological engine that was Kiv Stanlor's body became fully alive once more.

Red O'Hanahan glanced at his wrist watch and said: "Two minutes. I wonder what's in the damned thing that he had to guard it so carefully?"

Craig did not bother to answer the purely rhetorical question.

The metallic block sat on the table before them, looking maddeningly useless and plain—resembling nothing more than a child's toy.

Minutes went by, then: POP! From the monogrammed top, a small cylindrical section protruded about half a centimeter.

Eagerly, Craig reached over and pushed it. He froze in that position as if paralyzed. Beside him, the big Irishman found himself unable to move a muscle.

From the cube came a soft radiance, and in their fully awake minds ran a forced thought:

My name is Kivlond Stanlor, citizen of the first class of this Galaxy. You knew me as Keith Sorensen. For reasons that I cannot reveal to you, I have taken the eight kilograms of isotope that we made for experimental purposes.

This loss must not be revealed to anyone else.

It was necessary that I plan the accident which seemed to kill me in order that I might return to Earth, and that my identity as Keith Sorensen might be unobtrusively done

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away with.

If my plan succeeds—and I foresee no reason why it should not—I will be out of the Solar System by the time you activate this broadcaster.

I am leaving this record in order that the knowledge which I have forced upon you be not used accidentally to destroy the entire terrestrial civilization. Upon my return, I shall report to my government of your existence, of which they have heretofore been ignorant. Do not fear this outside civilization, for you are part of it.

Eight hundred thousand years ago, the luxury liner "Garnaveen" *was making its usual trip to the planets of the star Sendar, from the planet Ledor VIII. Somehow, their instruments failed. They were thrown off course and went too near the Sayten sun, a white dwarf, which gives off radiation that has a peculiar effect on the mind. As they were reduced to a state of near idiocy, they were unable to control the ship, and eventually landed on your planet and established a colony. The present so-called "human beings" are the descendants of that group of survivors.*

In due time, you will rediscover the secret of interstellar travel of your own accord. When that time comes, you will be told of your relationship to the Galactics, and be admitted as members of our civilization.

Now, as to the effects of the total destruction of matter—

There followed a series of mathematical symbols and explanations.

Now, a final warning: Due to the peculiar hypnotic effect of this type of communication, you will be unable to reveal any part of it. If you attempt it, mental semantic blocks will render your attempts useless, and repeated attempts will have a detrimental effect on your brain. Be careful! When this is over, GET AWAY FROM THIS BOX! Then, the thought became less cold. *Don't take it so hard, fellows. Right afterward, I suggest you go down to George's for a quickie—have one for me, too.*

The thought ended, and the paralysis was removed as quickly as it had come. The two men leaped away from the table as the box dissolved in a flash of coruscating fire.

Five hundred light years from Sol, Kiv picked up the tiny wave lengths of beamed thought in his memoryless R-beam. With these beamed thoughts to follow, it would be simple to locate the base from which they came. Once there, he could replace his blank crystal with an impressed one and return to Ledor to make his report. Included in that report would be the data pointing out that eight hundred thousand years on Terra since the shipwreck had robbed the inhabitants of the mental and physical training that made them true Galactics, but in spite of that—how could it possibly be an infraction of the "No Contact" rule to aid the survivors?

Kiv smiled to himself — if the *Garnaveen* hadn't been found in eight thousand centuries, there was small chance of it being discovered now!

Besides, he liked the people of Earth, and there is always an exception to any rule.

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EARTH CAN BE FAIR

By

HUBERT GEORGE WELLS

(CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT)

Although the great Hubert George Wells has passed away, this last of his writings remains as the best monument that can be erected to his memory. In a few words, it sums up his viewpoint on Man!

SYNOPSIS OF WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

IN THE PRECEDING installments of his posthumous epic of man's conflict of his inner nature with his external accomplishments, the late Hubert George Wells has highlighted the history of humanity from Adam to the Atom.

His protagonists—Adam Furstman; his wife, Yve; and the Other Woman, Luisa Fuhr — are symbolic figures, seen first in the Garden, again in the Stone Age, during the Dark Ages, and now in the world of the very near future.

ADAM, the idealist and humanitarian, is a nuclear physicist in his present reincarnation.

YVE, his loyal, loving wife, halves his sorrows, doubles his joys, fights to save his soul from the sinister seductress:

LUISA FUHR, evil, unscrupulous, anational; lusting after global domination, perverting Adam's noble achievements, plotting his downfall.

WORLD SCENE: Suspicions multiply, tensions mount, tempers shorten while Adam, who asserts that "Earth can be fair," labors to evoke an eleventh hour miracle to emancipate mankind from the diabolic menace of Cosmic Disintegration. Yve stands ready to sacrifice her life if the "Atomigeddon" which Winchell predicts can be avoided. Madam Fuhr, the *femme fatale,* manipulates machiavellianly behind the scenes, while uranium piles approach critical mass at the four corners of the Earth and over the seven seas.

It is "later than we think!"

(Now go on with the story.)

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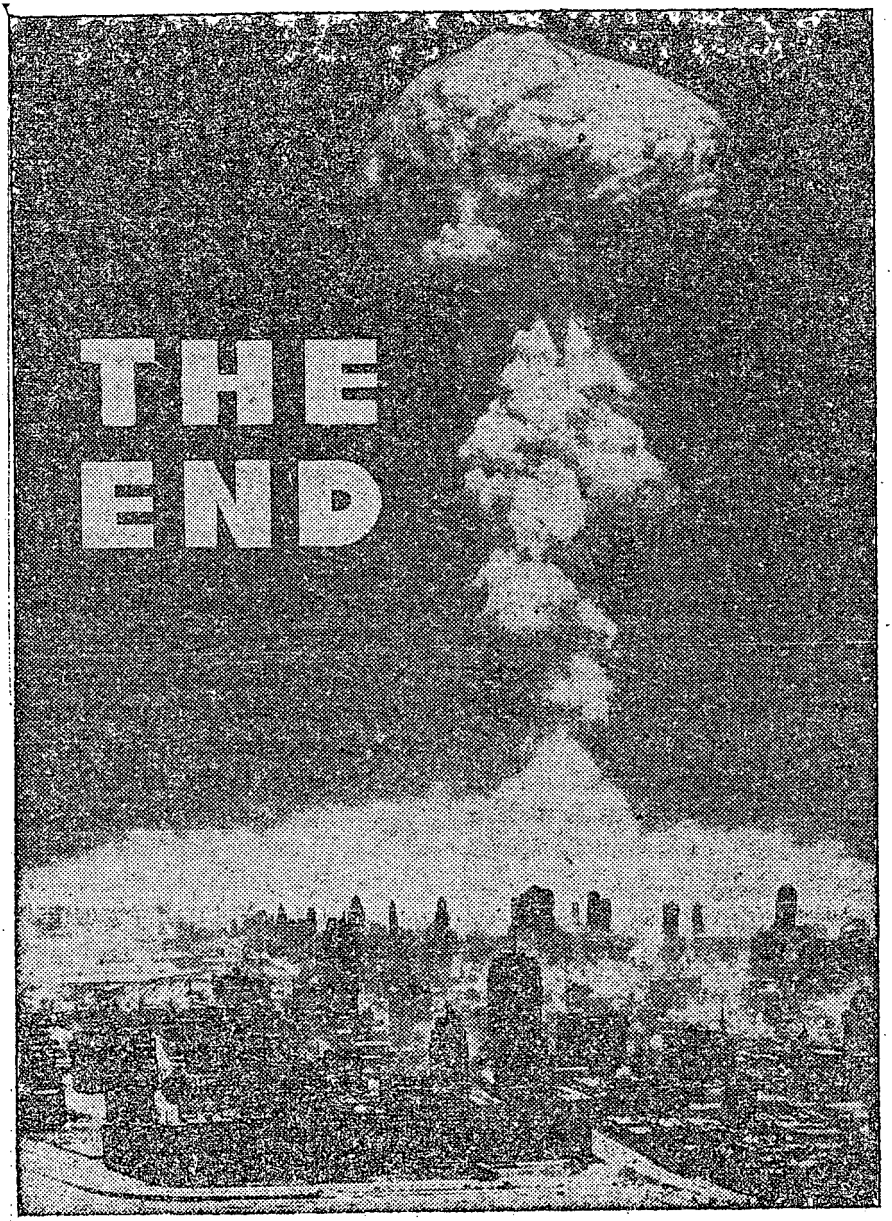

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NEWS OF THE MONTH

Latest reports on what our readers are doing. Fan clubs, social events and personalities in the limelight.

AMONG the numerous things that go to make science fiction unique among literary forms is the reaction of its readers. Followers of western or detective stories read them and let it go at that. For those interested in science fiction, that is only the start. They make collections of science fiction. They write letters to the editors. They write letters to the authors. They publish fanzines. They organize. They correspond with each other and often travel long distances to meet. In short, they indulge in all the activities that are lumped under the heading of Science fiction Fandom.

Possibly it is because the enjoyment of science fiction entails some special quality of mind, but whenever two fans meet, they immediately find that they have many things in common. Many lasting friendships have been formed at first meetings.

Fandom has contributed many of science fiction's top names. Among those who moved into the professional ranks through fandom are Ray Palmer and Bea Mahaffey, Editor and Managing Editor respectively of OTHER WORLDS, Ray Bradbury, Bill Hamling and Bob Bloch.

The zenith of fan activity is reached in the annual international conventions, where interested parties assemble for several days of speeches, discussions and get-togethers. Since the first one, held in New York in 1939, World Science Fiction Conventions have been held in Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Toronto and, last year, Cincinnati. This year the site chosen is Portland, Oregon. The convention is known as The NORWESCON, (abbreviated from Northwest Convention) and it will take place over the Labor Day Weekend, September 1st through 4th.

The convention sites are chosen at the previous year's convention. Interested groups submit bids which are voted on by the delegates present. Portland's bid was submitted by the Portland Science-Fantasy Society, for the past three years one of the most active groups in the country. In addition to their local activities, the Portland club served as a nucleus for fan activity for the entire northwest, bringing together fans who later formed the Eugene (Oregon) Science Fantasy Society and the Nameless Ones of Seattle. The PSFS has also put on regional get-togethers, the largest being the "little" NORWESCON held to celebrate their second birthday last April. It was attended by fans from Seattle and Eugene and Forrest J. Ackerman came all the way from Los Angeles to attend.

It is difficult to explain the interest and excitement of a science fiction convention to one who has never attended one. The biggest attraction is the people who attend. Countless friendships are made and renewed. You will find scores of interesting personalities whom you will want to know better and who seem like old friends five minutes after you meet. Such authors as Rog Phillips, George O. Smith, Doc Smith, Doc Keller and many others will be present. Prominent fans such as Rick Sneary, Bob Tucker, Forrie Ackerman, Art Rapp and Rosco Wright will attend. And with them will be scores of readers and fans, all with interesting things to discuss, subjects to keep the bull-sessions going to all hours after the sessions of the convention.

As for the program, it will contain things of interest to everyone who enjoys science fiction and fantasy. There will be talks on a variety of subjects by top authors and authorities on different fields of fantasy interest. There will be question and answer periods. There will be forums and discussion periods where you can air your views. There will be an auction where you may purchase original illustrations from OTHER WORLDS and other magazines as well as rare fantasy books and other collectors' items. There will be demonstrations and displays, stunts and all sorts of entertainment. There will be a banquet and a masked ball, with prizes for the best cos-

(Concluded on page 52)

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THE FROWNZLY FLORGELS

By FREDRIC BROWN

Some years ago Fredric Brown and artist Hannes Bok were discussing the policy of writing a story around an illustration. Said Brown: "I can write a story around any illustration!" Said Bok: "That's a bet!" Well, here is the illustration — and the story. Who do you think won?

OH, it was going to be a lovely frownz. They all knew that; Nax had sent out the thought and it had gone from star to star throughout the cluster. The competition as to who could go had been terrific. Everybody envied Nax the Agoraphobe because he was the only one who didn't have to compete with a thousand or a million others to get there. But there was plenty of reason for that.

Teppo got there first—except, of course, for Nax, who was there to begin with. Nax lived inside the planetoid Naxo which once had another name but for the several million years Nax had lived there, it had been Naxo and the other name was forgotten. Nax had been a mutant Ragan and, as was the custom, he had been teleported to a barren world and was abandoned to die. But he'd lived—indeed, he'd turned out to be practically immortal—and now he was the oldest and wisest of all, despite his peculiarities. He nearly starved for the first thousand years or so, until he was able to adjust his metabolism so he could eat the substance of which Naxo was made. After he'd eaten his way inside he developed such acute agoraphobia that he could never come out again; he'd die if he did. Oh, everyone knew that Nax didn't have forever to live, because sooner or later he'd eat out the interior of the planetoid completely and the crust would collapse, leaving him exposed, and he'd surely die. But that time was at least ten million years away and Nax was quite cheerful about it. "Who wants to live forever?" he'd clairvoy, with a happy laugh. No one knew exactly what Nax was planning for this particular frownz, but it would be fun; it always was.

Teppo had teleported himself in a globule of liquid glass, his native element. He was going to have trouble, he knew, maintaining the temperature of the glass and would have to use part of his mind at all times to maintain the molecular vibration, but he'd still have enough mind left to enjoy the frownz thoroughly.

Being the first arrival, he didn't

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Illustration by Hannes Bok

want to wake Nax if Nax was sleeping, so he floated around looking down through the holes in the planetoid to see if the giant was stirring. The holes looked like craters, but really they were holes Nax had pushed through from inside so he could see and reach through and so the methane could mingle freely inside the planetoid and without. Nax was still asleep, but Teppo could voy him beginning to stir. Teppo subvibed a while to make the outside of his globule a reflecting surface; that way he could kill time waiting for the others by admiring the reflection of his sleek finny beauty. He wriggled his tail and sighed with an ecstasy of admiration.

When he hivibed and made the surface transparent again, he was no longer alone. Two others were there

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already. The cylindroid from Karebranthal floated smugly beside him and one of the amorphous smoke-cloud beings from Thal writhed lugubriously in the methane over one of the apertures of Naxo. While Teppo watched, the smoke-cloud flowed into the hole to see if Nax was ready.

The others were coming, too. The groc teleported right in front of his eyes, in the egg, of course. Grocs always returned to their eggs to teleport themselves off Hanra; once they reached their destination, they cracked the egg from within and stuck their hideous heads out, preferring to remain that way until ready to return. Then they pulled in their heads and hivibed until the egg was reknitted. No one had ever seen a groc completely out of its egg off its own planet of Hanra. Teppo looked at the groc's head and was glad that he was beautiful.

The disk-creature from Amron and the sphere-being from Ell teleported into sight together and high in the violet sky the rocket trails of the ships of the Zatto and the Rang could be made out, both from backward planets which had not yet developed teleportation and the ability to adapt to any medium. They still depended on crude rockets for their interstellar travels. Annoying things the rockets would have been, too, had not they—and, of course, their occupants—been so tiny.

The smoke-cloud being was now coming out of the planetoid, voying happily that Nax was getting ready. The cylindroid smugged with pleasure and the two rockets went into ecstatic acrobatics; the one from Zatto doing gay circles into and out of holes in the planetoid and the one from Rang showing off its new inertialess drive by cutting impossibly sharp corners, and worrying all the rest of them.

Gera, the weirdly shaped thing from Garn, was next. Teppo averted his eyes from her body with its ugly protuberances; it would take him several glances to get used to her sufficiently to forget her monstrousness. She was of the race of Ragans of which Nax was a mutant, but then the mutation was undoubtedly an improvement and besides one didn't have to look at Nax. . . .

Gera, the Ragan, cavorted gaily in the methane, happiest of them all. True, argon was her natural element, but it wasn't hard to adapt, and the antigrav pseudothought of Nax made cavorting an ineffable pleasure. She caught Teppo's fishy stare, and laughed. What did Nax have in mind for this frownz? Besides, of course, the florgels? She was glad she wasn't a giant, like Nax, imprisoned in a planetoid, and that she didn't have to live in a molten glass world like Teppo. She was glad of everything, but especially of the fact that she'd been chosen to represent Raga, and that she was here.

Who was missing? She looked around and counted—well, not exactly noses because she was the only one who had a nose, but she counted. They were all here except two, and one of them—the spear-spore from

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Gelf, appeared right while she was looking for it. A stupid thing, the spear-spore; it had to materialize gradually after a teleportation. But at least it *could* teleport, and it was far ahead of most of the rest of them at glyphing.

And then there was the other—the asteworld of the swarm, the tiny planetoid that had, that was, life in itself.

And they were all there, and Nax was voying a welcome, obviously having gragged the arrival of the asteworld at the very microsecond of its arrival. They were all there, and all joyous, and Nax was voying them gaywelcome and the frownz was on. The representatives of all the star cluster were there.

Pretty soon the florgels, but first Nax stuck his hand out with the book and each of them hurled a thought at it and the thought was recorded by the book—all except, of course, the poor little occupants of the spaceships from Zatto and Rang. The occupants were too primitive and had to relay their thoughts through the others for recording. Gera laughed at them tolerantly; the poor things couldn't even glyph.

And then Nax pulled the book back and the frownz really started.

First, of course, the games. They played ranzel, and Gera won that. They played a dozen other games, each more fun than the last, and because they were so diverse in their physical forms and mental capabilities, each of them managed to excel in something.

They ended with a game of murl, the best game of all, in Teppo's opinion. But maybe that was because he almost always won it, and he did this time, too. But then he had an advantage at murl, since it was played with the strings and hooks that his race used on their own planet to catch birds. They glyphed the hook into the air baited with a corro and pulled the birds down into the molten glass if they grabbed the corro. So Teppo was the one who managed to hook the hoga (an object shaped like a teacup but used on Gera's planet to catch whings out of the flug) which was alternately materialized and dematerialized in various places in the methane by Nax. Teppo was so proud of himself for winning the murl that he kept the hook, string and hoga materialized right through the florgels after the games.

The first few florgels were old familiar ones and then Nax voyed that he had something new for them to try. "We shall," he voyed, "try to contact another mind somewhere in the universe."

"Oh, wonderful, Nax," voyed the spear-spore. "How? Individually, or the group-mind?"

"The group-mind. We'll all focus our thoughts through the Book of Florgels." And he held the book out for them to focus on. He voyed his plan; they would all focus on the book the thought of their group, just as it was; he would gram the thought, two-way, to the most distant galaxy they knew of and attune it to a single mind there, if there turned out to be one. And in that mind—if it existed—would appear the picture of them

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at the florgel. In their own minds, if the plan succeeded, would appear whatever thought-picture was in the alien mind with which contact was made.

Nax gave the signal and they formed the group-mind and focused on the book, and Nax groaned with the effort of his gramming across so many billion parsecs.

But it was the worst florgel they had ever tried, not because it didn't work, but because it did. It was horrible, the picture they got in return from that alien mind in the far galaxy. Gera covered her eyes as though that could shut out the awfulness of it, the cylindroid curled itself into a doughnut shape from shock and the groc pulled its head back into the egg.

But they all recovered gradually and none of them voyed about it; they had all seen it, so there was nothing to voy about. And to enable them to forget quickly, Nax called another florgel, the old familiar one of the nova and the cepheid variable. . . .

* * *

Excerpts from a letter from Hannes Bok, artist and illustrator, New York, to Fredric Brown, writer, Taos, New Mexico:

Lieber Freidrich:

'Member that challenge we thunk up while you were in New York last fall—that you could write a story around *any* picture I could draw, no matter what? And that the rules of the game were to be that the scene represents actual existing conditions and is *not* to be explained as a dream, hoax, optical illusion or insanity on part of observer? Well, here's the pic. I soddenly got an idea for it, out of the blue.

Can these things be satellites—an egg, a gigantic coin, a free floating drop of water with a fish inside? And if they are satellites (maybe you have a better explanation) can there be an atmosphere present? If not, how come the girl is having a high old time cavorting in airlessness, and her with no insulated clothing or oxygen helmet? And if the cratered moon around which these wacky satellites revolve is barren, how come the huge hand sticking out of the crater and holding a book? How can it live with smoke coming out of another crater. Maybe it's smoke from the monsker's pipe—but then how come the rocket shooting out of another crater?

And what's the title of the book? Why is the fish dragging a fish-hook on a line, baited with an empty teacup? Remember that the rules are that every single point must be explained!

With frownzly florgels,

HANNES

Letter from Fredric Brown, Taos, New Mexico, to Hannes Bok, New York City:

Dear Hannes:

You didn't play fair. The picture is utterly impossible. Anyone who'd even *try* to write a story around it is crazy.

Frownzly florgels to *you!*

FRED

THE END

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REVIEWS OF CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS

NOMAD
by George O. Smith
Prime Press, Philadelphia—$3.00)

George O. Smith has once again taken an adventuresome hero, beautiful girls, spaceship battles and the technology of the future as the basic ingredients of his novel. By mixing them well, he has concocted a highly entertaining space-opera in which the action and intrigue continue throughout the entire story.

Beginning with his capture by the Martians, Guy Maynard moves from one adventure to another with amazing rapidity: his visit to Ertene, the planet whose wanderlust keeps it roving the universe, never settling permanently; the discovery of Mephisto, tenth planet in our own system; his rise to Sector-Marshal on Earth, and the subsequent trial where he is confronted with the choice of betraying his oath to Ertene or being condemned a traitor; and finally, the culmination of these events in an impending three way war betwen Ertene, Mars and Earth. Involved in these adventures and contributing to his problems are Laura Greggor, daughter of the Space-Marshall; Thomas Kane, Maynard's publisher-friend; Leilanane, the fragile Ertenian girl and Joan Forbes, whose love for Maynard leads her to follow him into the heart of the Mephisto-Terran holocaust.

"NOMAD," says the book-jacket, "is not Great Literature. It is not fraught with Social Significance. It points out no Morals, no Great Future. NOMAD is just a novel aimed at your amusement, to drive away your cares . . ." If providing a couple of hours of entertainment was the aim of NOMAD, we would say that it had scored a direct hit on its target.

THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES
by Ray Bradbury
Doubleday & Company, $2.50

Ray Bradbury's second book, *The Martian Chronicles,* is a series of loosely connected episodes depicting the possible results of the first few Earth expeditions to Mars. He brings to life such unforgettable characters as Ylla, the lonely Martian wife who wistfully awaits the arrival of the first Earth ship; Spender, the Earthman who could not bear to think of the delicate Martian cities being profaned by curious and unfeeling Earth tourists; Stendahl, who chose a weird and terrible method of revenging himself against his enemies; and Sam Parkhill who opened the first hot-dog stand on Mars. These people, and many others, are brought into vivid existence by means of Bradbury's skillful narration and his ability to make alien Mars and the Martians as real and familiar as your next-door neighbors. While there is no cut and dried plot to *The Martian Chronicles,* Bradbury has delicately threaded the various incidents together in a manner that makes it virtually impossible to put the book down before you have read the last syllable of the last word.

The volume itself is beautifully bound, with a jacket that while eye-catchingly science-fiction, is not blatantly so. The exterior of the book is an attractive addition to your bookshelf, and the material contained between the covers will provide you with reading pleasure that will linger in your memory.

COMING IN THE NOVEMBER ISSUE, On Sale October 3

BUBASTIS OF EGUPT by Craig Browning. An angry girl seeks a terrible revenge.
MILLIONS IN IT by H. A. Highstone. MacTavish battles the Telephone Company.
THE MERCHANT OF VENUS by Richard Ashby. Shakespeare and space ships to the rescue.
EVEN STEVEN by Charles Harness. One good turn, they say, deserves another.
THE JOB IS ENDED by Wilson Tucker. He was hired to find someone. But who, or what?

And Many Others . . . Don't Miss Your Copy!

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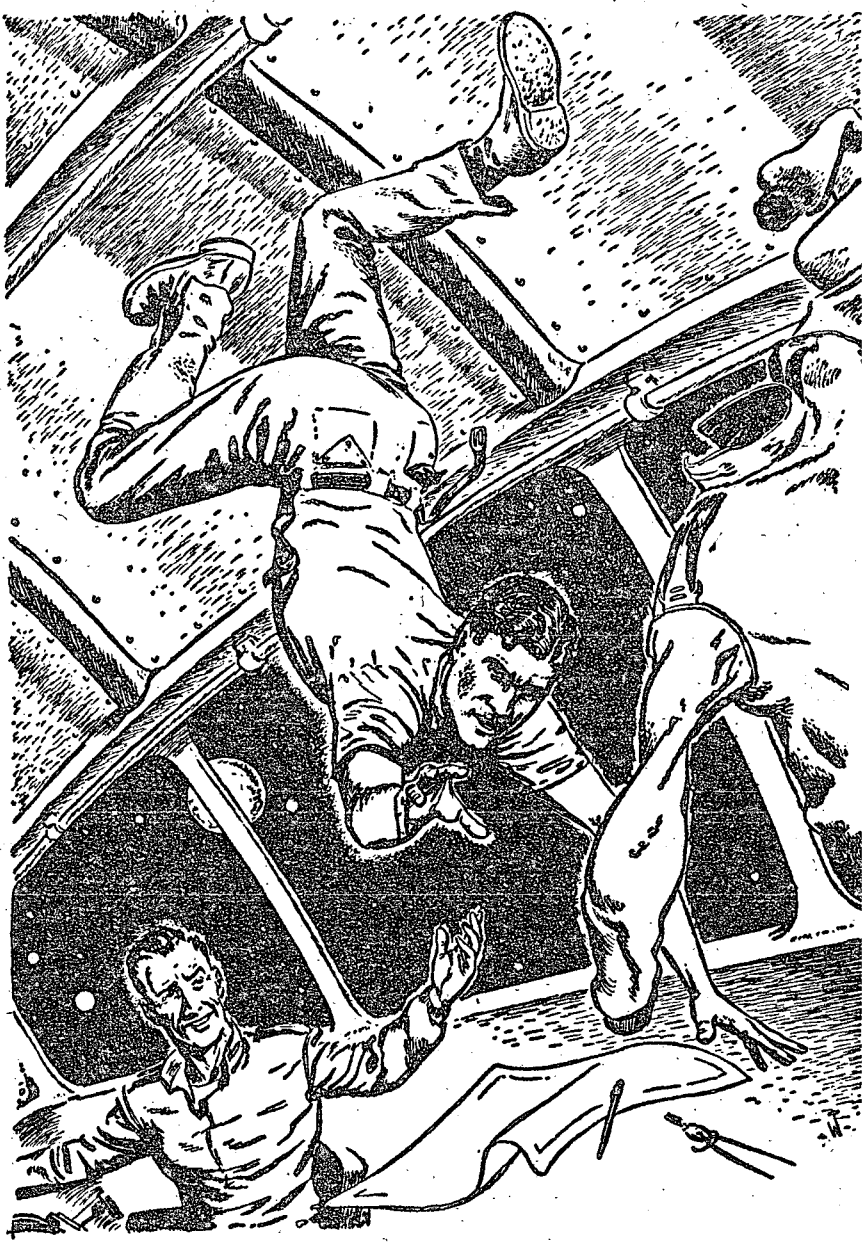

Illustration by Bill Terry

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CAPTAIN HAM

By
JOHN
and
DOROTHY
De COURCY

He was captain of one of the giant modern space-liners — it would be a cinch to fly the *first* spaceship to Venus!

Captain Hamling Fox III

IT IS RESOLVED THAT INASMUCH AS IT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION TO GIVE TO THE CITIZEN OF THIS CENTURY A CLEARER IDEA OF THE PAGEANT OF SPACE TRAVEL AND ITS BEGINNINGS, THAT THE FIRST SUCCESSFUL MOON ROCKET, THE LUNA III, BE RECONDITIONED AND ITS ORIGINAL VOYAGE AROUND THE MOON DUPLICATED, THAT ITS EMBARCATION SHALL BE MADE FROM ITS ORIGINAL LAUNCHING SITE, THAT ITS ARRIVAL SHALL COINCIDE WITH THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION OF SPACE TRAVEL, AND THAT BOTH ITS DEPARTURE AND ARRIVAL SHALL BE TRANSMITTED AROUND THE WORLD VIA VIDEO AND OPTICAL PROJECTION.

IT IS FURTHER RESOLVED BY THE PLANNING COMMITTEE THAT THE FIRST SUCCESSFUL INTERPLANETARY ROCKET, THE PROMETHEUS BE REMOVED FROM THE INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM AND FITTED FOR SPACE TRAVEL, AND THAT SAID PROMETHEUS SHALL EMBARK FOR VENUS AT THE HOUR AND MINUTE AT WHICH VENUS APPROACHES ITS POSITION WHEREIN THE ORIGINAL FLIGHT WAS MADE INASMUCH AS THIS CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION SHALL BEGIN ACCORDING TO THIS PLANETARY POSITION IRRESPECTIVE OF THE AC-

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TUAL TIME IN EARTH YEARS.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT THE CREWS OF THE ABOVE MENTIONED SPACE CRAFT SHALL BE CHOSEN BY A BOARD OF EXAMINERS ON THE BASIS OF SKILL, EXPERIENCE, AND PREVIOUS RECORD OF INTELLIGENCE.

(Excerpt from the minutes of the first meeting of the Planning Committee for the Centennial Celebration of Space Travel.)

CAPTAIN Hamling Fox III, better known as Captain Ham when he was out of earshot, reported to the offices of Terran Space Lines quite sure of what was to come. Since he was the commander of the two thousand, five hundred passenger Antares, the largest space ship to be constructed, it was fitting that he should impress others with the dignity and honor of his great responsibility.

The receptionist greeted him pleasantly. "Good morning, Captain Fox. The Director is expecting you."

Captain Fox nodded abruptly and walked past the reception desk. The girl followed his tall figure with a speculative eye then turned back to her work.

The Director glanced up when his secretary opened the door. "Captain Fox is here, Mr. Black."

"Send him right in," the Director replied.

The secretary also covertly studied Captain Fox. He was young and handsome in a rather arrogant way and obviously brilliant to hold such a responsible position. There was something, about him however which was slightly repulsive. Self adulation and exaltation seemed to ooze from his pores and he accepted all admiration as his logical due. This may have accounted for the fact that at thirty-two he was still a bachelor.

"Good morning, Captain, good morning," the Director said, rising from his chair and extending a hand. "Hope I haven't inconvenienced you."

"Not at all, Mr. Black," Captain Fox replied, conveying the impression that it was indeed an inconvenience and Black could be duly thankful that he had come.

Mr. Black chuckled hollowly. There was something about this Captain Hamling Fox III, that annoyed him but he was feeling too good right now to bother with annoyances. He motioned Captain Fox to a chair which the young Captain accepted regally. Mr. Black cleared his throat and said, "I suppose you've heard all about the Centennial?"

"Naturally," Captain Fox replied, casually.

"Well, in that case, you know that the Luna III and the Prometheus are going to duplicate their original flights?"

Captain Fox nodded.

"The crews for the two flights have been selected with great care and you will be happy to learn that you are among the successful candidates."

Captain Fox nodded again. "Yes, I rather expected I would be."

Mr. Black drew in a long breath and held it.

"In view of my past record, how could the committee select anyone

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else?"

"Oh no!" Mr. Black murmured to himself.

"Did you say something, Mr. Black?"

"Oh — no," Mr. Black repeated.

"Hmm yes," Captain Fox nodded. "At any rate, I considered the matter and decided that I would probably receive a nomination and possibly be elected, but — I wonder about a small point."

"What might that be?" Mr. Black asked, wondering that there was anything in this world of which Captain Fox was unsure.

"Well — ah — this is a great honor and all that rot but — well there's the matter of pay, you know, and seniority — and then there's my command, the Antares."

"Naturally, you'll receive full pay."

"Ah —of course," Captain Fox agreed, "but a man of my position in command of the largest craft on the line, well — there's a certain prestige — that — isn't exactly duplicated on an old hulk."

Mr. Black's jaw had been growing tighter and tighter. "Do you mean that you're going to turn it down?"

"Well — yes."

Mr. Black had been toying with an electrostylus and when Captain Fox replied, he involuntarily snapped it in half. "Are you serious?" he asked hoarsely. "But of course you're serious!" Taking another deep breath, he glanced at the memo pad on his desk. "Captain Fox," he began gently, "I know you realize that there are other space lines and that there are other captains working for those space lines. Suppose you turn this down and Trans-solar Navigation has a man commanding one of those ships. People are going to get the idea that Trans-solar has better captains than we do and because of the publicity, their business is going to improve."

He waited for Captain Fox to speak but the Captain merely looked at him blankly.

"If you think you're going to get away with this," Black roared, "you're crazy!!"

"Isn't it my prerogative?" Captain Fox asked incredulously.

Mr. Black groaned. Then he straightened suddenly. "Look, Captain Fox. Suppose I offer you double pay, triple pay!!"

Captain Hamling Fox III considered this for a moment then nodded his head. "Triple pay," he agreed.

Mr. Black slumped down in his chair again, mumbling under his breath. "There isn't a red-blooded spaceman alive that wouldn't give a month's pay for a chance at one of those babies just for the hell of it — and — they had to pick YOU!" He picked a card up from his desk and handed it to the Captain. "Here, talk to the committee about it. I don't feel up to it."

Captain Fox accepted the card and rose stiffly.

"But please," Mr. Black added, "don't make any unnecessary demands. Try to make it look as though you want to do this."

Captain Fox looked back at him from the door pityingly. "All right, Mr. Black, for you I'll do it."

Mr. Black's face convulsed again

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and he dropped his head down on his desk, cradling it in his arms. This was just too terrible. It couldn't actually be happening.

Captain Fox, however, walked calmly into the building that housed the Centennial Committee offices, looked around with a vague expression of disdain, then strode across the room to the reception desk.

"I am Captain Hamling Fox the third," he announced.

The receptionist looked up at him quizzically. "Ah — what can I do for you, Captain?"

"I would like to see the Planning Committee or — whoever is in charge."

The receptionist pressed a button. "Captain Hamling Fox to — "

"Captain Hamling Fox the THIRD," the young captain interrupted.

"Captain Hamling Fox the THIRD," the receptionist repeated in a strained voice, "to see you."

Captain Fox could not hear the reply but the receptionist pointed to a door. "The chairman will see you."

As was his custom, Captain Fox replied with a curt nod, walked to the door and opened it without knocking. The chairman, a stocky, graying man with a perpetual smile on his face, was standing beside his desk.

"Ah, Captain Fox. Nice to see you. I'm Humphry Cain, chairman of the Planning Committee."

"Delighted to meet you," Captain Fox replied automatically.

"You've come about your nomination, of course. It's certainly been a job selecting men for these historic flights. I imagine you feel quite lucky."

"Not exactly," Captain Fox replied, "but I've decided to accept your offer."

The perpetual grin on Cain's face dimmed a trifle. "Ah — yes," he chuckled. "Well, we thought that you would like to command the Luna III. That way, it won't interfere with your regular activities."

"If you don't mind, I would rather command the Prometheus. It's a larger ship you know and I'll be getting triple pay."

"Well — Captain, I'm not sure — you see — well — the arrangements have all been made — "

"Oh — I see. Well — that's unfortunate. I had hoped to be able to take part in your little celebration. Good day, sir."

"Wh — wait!" Cain gasped. "Y — your joking! You're not turning this down!!"

Captain Fox stared at him, puzzled. "Well naturally, old man. It's purely a practical thing. I draw a hundred credits a day in flight which means I would receive three hundred a day on one of these trips, but the Luna III will only be on a six day run so it would hardly be worth my while. On the other hand, the Prometheus will be on a thirty-six day run and it would make a rather tidy sum."

"Y — you mean — you're doing this for money?"

"Why of course," Captain Fox replied, smiling. "It's my company that wants me to command one of the

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ships. I'm doing it merely as a favor to them."

Humphry Cain stared at him without a trace of his perpetual smile. "You WILL command the Prometheus but you WON'T command the Luna III. Is that right?"

"In essence, yes."

Cain shuddered to think of the video announcements. "Captain Fox of Terran turns down Centennial!" He gritted his teeth. "Very well, then. I'll make the necessary changes. It's a little late but — "

"Thank you," Captain Fox said, as if this were the thing which should have been done in the first place.

Cain didn't hear him. He was still thinking about all the changes that would have to be made and wondering if he could get it all done in time. "Yes," he murmured. "You can command the Prometheus."

They shook hands and Captain Fox left, so he didn't hear what Humphry Cain suggested he do with the Prometheus.

A few days later, Captain Fox received an invitation to a banquet at which he was to meet the other members of his crew, but he declined with a short note saying that he always met his crew when he boarded his ship. This enhanced his unpopularity almost as much as did his refusal to attend instructions in the operation of the Prometheus. This note stated, "I am aware of the principles of space flight." Sincerely, Captain Hamling Fox III.

He did, however, condescend to come down to the field an hour before time to board ship. A special escort ushered him through the expectant crowd and over to the gayly bedecked platform. All eyes were turned toward the heavens to get the first glimpse of the returning Luna III, and it disturbed the Captain somewhat that his arrival received so little attention.

As he mounted the steps of the platform where the officials, dignitaries, participants and the other members of his crew were waiting, several video men rushed forward and focused their equipment on him. Since Captain Fox had become the attraction of the moment, the chairman of the Planning Committee took this opportunity to introduce him to the other members of the crew.

"Captain Fox, these are your shipmates. May I introdu — "

"Please!" Captain Fox interrupted. He turned to the three uniformed men standing at the chairman's side. "Attention!" he barked.

The three looked at each other momentarily as though wondering what to do, then with half smiles, they lined up, shoulder to shoulder. The oldest of the group, a heavy, gnarled man, stepped forward and saluted. "Chief Engineer, Joe Underhill," he mumbled.

The second man stepped forward, trying vainly to hide the smile on his thin, dark face. "Navigator, Gordon Le Strange."

The third made no effort to cover his amusement and chuckled when he said, "Maintenance Officer, Max Weston."

Captain Fox glared at the three men in true disciplinary fashion then said,

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"Men, I expect complete discipline aboard my ship. You're good men and I know we'll work well together." He glared at them again. "At rest!" He turned to Cain who had been standing at his side, and thereby failed to see the suppressed convulsions of laughter of his crew. "Please don't interfere with the relationship between me and my crew," he said to the chairman. "Discipline is the backbone of good spacemanship."

Like others before him, the thought occurred to Cain that this couldn't be real. It must be a bad dream.

At that moment, the landing signal sounded and all eyes turned back to the sky. The Captain of the Luna III carried with him a pair of golden shears inset with diamonds and rubies which he was to give to Captain Fox. It would then be carried to Venus by Captain Fox where he would cut the tape across the vast, new space-port which had hurriedly been completed in time for the Centennial. So it was with a great deal of glowing pride that Captain Fox watched the tiny dot of light appear and mushroom rapidly into an inferno of roaring, incandescent gasses.

The Luna III made a rather hard landing, rocked precariously, then settled upright. It was a tense crowd that waited for the hatch to open and when it did, three men emerged, greasy, dirty, their uniforms torn and one with a bandage on his head.

The captain, limping slightly, led the bedraggled group across the field and up the stairs. When he finally reached the top of the platform, he extracted the golden shears from his tunic and held them forth to Captain Fox. As Captain Fox's hand closed over the shears, the other man chuckled. "It couldn't happen to a better man," he murmured.

Captain Fox accepted this compliment as obvious, called his men to attention, marched down to the field and over to the waiting Prometheus. As soon as the four men had disappeared inside, the decorated gangplank was withdrawn and the hatch closed.

Inside, Captain Fox wheeled and faced the other three. "Le Strange, I assume you are to act as my first officer so I would like all hands assembled after the takeoff."

There was an awkward silence then Joe Underhill snorted. "Beg your pardon, Captain, but all hands ARE assembled."

Captain Fox looked at him blankly. "All hands? Are you joking, Underhill?"

"We're all there is."

"But where's my pilot?"

"What do you thing you are?"

"I'll have no insubordination!" Captain Fox snapped.

"Don't you think we'd better get this thing off the ground and argue about it afterward? You put on a good show out there so let's call it off now and get to work."

Captain Fox stiffened. "I'll have you before the Commission for insubordination, Underhill!"

Underhill snickered but said nothing.

"All right men. Report to your stations. We'll take off immediately."

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He turned on his heel and marched up the companionway to a door marked, Control Room. His fingers groped expectantly for the opening button which he failed to find. He stepped back from the door a little and looked at it. It was dogged shut and it suddenly occurred to Captain Fox for the first time that he wasn't aboard a modern craft. He grasped the dog with one hand and wrenched. It didn't move. Using both hands, he pressed on it. It still didn't move. Angrily, he threw his weight behind it and shoved. The dog gave way all at once and his knuckles smashed into the bulkhead.

His bellow of pain and rage brought a head through a door at the far end of the companionaway. "Having trouble, Captain?" Joe Underhill called.

Captain Fox flung the door open. "NO!" he yelled. With all his strength he hurled the door shut behind him and at that instant his forward movement was arrested. Over his shoulder he could see that his coat tail was pinioned in the air seal gasket and the dog had fallen back into place.

"Underhill!" he screamed. He pounded frantically at the dog with his knuckles but he couldn't reach high enough to free it. In frustrated rage he started unbuttoning his tunic. At that very moment, the dog flicked open and the door was shoved inward with considerable violence. The edge of the door collided with the back of Captain Fox's head and sent him sprawling on his face.

"Did you ring, sir?" Underhill asked.

Captain Fox got up on his hands and knees, shook his head as if to clear it then looked up at the Chief Engineer. "Underhill!" he croaked. "I'll see that you're busted for this! Get back to your station!"

Grinning, Underhill pulled the door shut and jerked the dog down in place. He must have been a strong man for the dog was nearly as tight as it would go. Captain Fox didn't notice this, though. He arose, shaking, and walked to the controls.

The control room itself was a rather narrow cubicle with a transparent bow. From the ports, Captain Fox could see the excited crowd and the group waiting tensely on the platform. Pulling his jacket down, he sank into the control chair. His eyes took in the controls with a single sweep. Not one of them looked familiar.

Thirty seconds passed during which time his mind worked feverishly. At last, feeling fairly sure of himself, he turned on the annunciator system. "Stations report!"

"Engine room ready."

"Maintenance ready."

"Navigation ready."

"Twenty seconds!" Captain Fox called. He inched the acceleration lever forward and glanced at the others beside it. He decided that the one with the red handle must be the activator. His memory told him that this ship had been powered by atomic fission. Other vague memories stirred around in his mind but failed to come to the surface.

"Ten seconds!" Captain Fox called. He flipped the master switches closed

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and watched the signal lights blink on. Instrument needles quivered and adjusted themselves and the whine of small motors could be heard.

"Five seconds!" Captain Fox called, "four, three, two, one." His perspiring hand pushed the activator forward. Immediately a great hand seemed to jerk him out of his seat, hurl him against the wall a few feet behind and he felt no more.

Captain Fox had a vague sensation that much time had passed. This was crowded out of his consciousness when his stomach began to knot and retch. He struggled to open one eye and finally succeeded. He was either lying on, hanging from, or next to a bunk. His semicircular canals told him nothing. He felt something tight across his stomach which turned out to be a broad, webbed belt.

"Where am I?" he asked, too sick to be original.

He heard a rustle of movement and Max Weston's face swam into view. Swam was the proper word, for he was lying horizontally in the air and pulling himself, hand over hand, on a chromium plated hand rail.

"Oh don't do that!" Captain Fox groaned. "Get down on the deck where you belong."

The figure made a quarter turn so that the face was directly upside down. Captain Fox discovered this when he opened his eyes again. His stomach retched but not so much this time. "What's the matter with you?" he asked weakly.

"Nothing," the upside down face replied. "Are you feeling better now, Captain?"

Some of the Captain's scattered wits began to reassemble. "Why are we in free fall? Tell that mutinous engineer to get the floor gravs on!"

"Captain, this ship is a hundred years old. It hasn't any!"

"Tell Underhill I want to see him anyway! And have him come in right side up!!"

"Okay Captain." Weston made his way to the door with graceful overhand strokes. He grasped the dog and pulled himself in a quarter circle so that he was right side up, apparently standing on the deck. Then he flipped open the dog and disappeared.

"What a mess!" Captain Fox muttered. "No discipline! Broken down ship! An incompetent crew! I'll have them ALL before the Commission!"

Joe Underhill came through the doorway, right side up. He was floating through the air, his feet not moving and he stretched out his hands, catching himself on the bunk. To Captain Fox, this sight was even worse than Weston's swimming.

"Underhill!" Captain Fox said thickly. "I'm going to charge you with attempted murder!"

Underhill laughed. "You mean when I opened the control room door?"

"No, that's not what I mean. You either cut off the acceleration compensator or you failed to have it in proper condition and as a result, I was nearly killed in the takeoff."

Underhill pulled himself into what appeared to be a sitting position on the bunk. "Son," he replied, "I'm nearly twice your age and I've been

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a spaceman ever since I was seventeen. Yet when they wanted me to come down and learn how to run this thing, I came. There ISN'T any acceleration compensator! You tie yourself down and hang on for dear life! Thank heavens you only set the acceleration for two G's. Otherwise you'd have been squashed like a bug!"

With a start of horror, Captain Fox remembered that he had meant to begin the flight at twelve G's, the limit of the lever, but for some reason had failed to do so.

"I'll have no insubordination," the Captain said abruptly. "Now get off my bed. I'm going back to the bridge."

"You feel well enough?"

"Sir!" the Captain screamed.

"Sir," Underhill added casually.

"Of course I'm well enough!" It took all of his strength to unfasten the buckle on the strap which held him down. Underhill had reached the door when Captain Fox attempted to straighten himself out of the bunk. He heard a dull thud and turned to see the Captain floating limply toward the deck again, his eyes closed in unconsciousness.

Underhill propelled himself back to the bunk, drew the Captain's limp form onto it and fastened the belt across him. He put one arm around a stay and sighed as he pulled the ship's log from a pocket. Laboriously he wrote, "0700. Thirteenth hour of flight. Captain unconscious again." Then he scribbled his signature and tucked the log back in his pocket.

Two hours passed before Captain Fox regained consciousness. Every joint ached as he eased himself out of the bunk and along the hand rail. It took some arduous work before he gained access to the companionway and after wrestling with another dog, he finally entered the control room.

Le Strange, the navigator, who was working at a calculating machine which was strapped to his knee, looked up. "Hello Captain. Where're your pants?"

Captain Fox looked downward and saw that he had on only a blouse and a pair of shorts. "I'll tolerate no insubordination!" he replied mechanically. "I don't know where they are."

Le Strange propelled himself out of the pilot's chair, floated across the small room and closed the hatchway, dogging it down. "There aren't any automatic checks on the hatchways so we have to keep them closed and dogged."

Captain Fox was floating horizontally in the air, one hand holding the rail, "Le Strange, see if you can find my clothes, will you please?" It was more of a plea than an order.

Le Strange nodded, opened the hatch and closed it behind him.

Slowly, Captain Fox made his way across the room and into the pilot's chair. He studied the unfamiliar controls, piecing information together bit by bit. He was just beginning to get a general idea of how things worked when the hatch opened and Le Strange returned.

"Here's your stuff, Captain." He grabbed onto the rail with one hand and shoved the bundle of clothing toward the Captain.

Captain Fox caught the bundle,

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unfastened it and wriggled into his pants. Donning his tunic, however, was a little difficult. He eventually ended up floating head downward with his tunic just out of reach. He groped for it savagely and succeeded only in turning himself away from it. He writhed and twisted in the air, trying to move himself but his hands and feet were just out of reach of everything.

Le Strange smiled. "I got loose a while ago," he said, holding out a helping hand. "It's a good thing the compartments aren't any bigger."

The Captain took hold of the hand and came downward to the deck. "Thank you," he said stiffly, feeling more like his old self.

The navigator nodded absently and went back to fiddling with the calculator.

When Captain Fox finally got his tunic on, he went back to the pilot's chair. "What is our position?"

"Huh?" Le Strange looked at him blankly.

"What is our position?" Captain Fox repeated.

"I'll have it in a minute," the navigator murmured. "Had a little trouble getting my readings."

"SIR!" the Captain bellowed.

Le Strange played with the keys of the calculator for a moment then looked up. "Did you say something, Ham?"

"WHAT!" the Captain gasped.

"Oh, I thought you said something." The navigator went back to calculating.

"MISTER LE STRANGE!!" Captain Fox snarled.

The navigator went on with his work. "Just call me Gordy. Everybody does."

Captain Fox leaped from his chair in rage. Le Strange heard the crash of breaking glass and glanced up, startled. The face of a large chronometer was bashed in and the Captain was in the process of ricochetting to the floor. However, Captain Fox didn't go completely out this time. The bandage which had been placed on his head after the last regrettable accident helped to cushion the shock. In a half daze, he felt the navigator grab him and thrust him back into the pilot's chair.

"Got to watch yourself in free fall," Le Strange grinned. "Are you hurt much?"

The Captain's mouth worked frantically but no words came out. Just as he was recovering his powers of speech, the navigator pulled a small, white card out of the calculator. "Well, here it is," he said.

Captain Fox stared at the card, trying to focus his eyes properly on the figures. When at last they began to register, he turned and glared at the navigator. "Mr. Le Strange!" he snapped.

"Just call me Gordy," the navigator suggested.

"MISTER LE STRANGE!" the Captain repeated venomously. "What does this mean, PLUS or MINUS five thousand kilometers?"

The navigator looked at him, puzzled. "Why it means we are somewhere within a sphere ten thousand kilometers in diameter arbitrarily set up in space."

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"I'm aware of what it means," Captain Fox replied with forced patience, "but why, may I ask, is there no accuracy? I KNOW that navigation in space can be pinned down to a sphere of less than a thousand meters! Are you going to tell me that YOU'RE the best navigator they could find? If this is a joke, I'll have you know I'll not tolerate it!"

"Joke?" Le Strange repeated, laughing. "But we have no beam calculator and certainly no space for a flight integrator. This is the best I can do with optical instruments considering the fact that I must use ports that have uneven refraction."

"But that's sheer guesswork!"

"Oh well, I can confirm it by calling our escort vessels but I understood that we were to try to simulate the first flight as much as possible."

"Oh never mind!" the Captain groaned.

Smiling slightly, the navigator began pulling himself toward the hatchway. He turned before closing it and looked back at the sagging figure of Captain Hamling Fox III. "Don't worry about it, Ham," he said. "When we approach Venus, I can pin it down to a gnat's eye."

Captain Fox went rigid in his chair but before he could say anything, the hatchway banged. "Two of them!" he mumbled. "Insubordination! Mutiny, that's what it is. If I ever make it to Venus, the Commission will hear of this."

Still seething, he went back to the controls. At the end of two hours, he made a slight correction in the course which might or might not be correct. He glanced again at the navigator's card. "Plus or minus five thousand kilometers!" he hissed.

The annunciator interrupted his cogitations on law and order. "Come and get it, Cap, if you feel up to it."

"WHAT!"

"I've got some food, skipper. Shall I bring it up?"

"What's the use," the Captain groaned.

"What did you say, skipper?"

"Never mind! I'll come after it!"

Captain Fox worked his way down the companionway and into a tiny mess room. Le Strange was fastening himself to the hand rail. "Better tie on, Ham," he said. "That way you've got two hands to eat with."

Captain Hamling Fox III stared at him balefully but he pulled one of the short belts attached to the hand rail around his body.

Max Weston, who was working at the small commissary unit, glanced at the Captain. "How you feeling, skipper? You get all your brains tucked back in again?"

The Captain's lips compressed. "I will not let him goad me," he breathed. "I will not let him goad me." Aloud, he said, "I'm feeling quite well, thank you."

Weston wrapped a small cord around his arm and pulled himself over to the Captain. Attached to the cord was a cloth bag which he gave to him. "Want me to show you how to — "

Captain Fox jerked the bag away. "I'm perfectly capable of handling it myself!"

"No offense," Weston replied, pull-

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ing himself back to the commissary.

The Captain opened the top of the bag, keeping the cord around his arm. He reached in and brought out a large, rubber syringe with a short neck. He stared at it for a moment then squeezed it a little. A stream of hot coffee squirted out and struck him neatly in the right eye.

"Ooouuuch!"

The other two men turned quickly. "Having trouble, skipper?" Weston asked.

The Captain ground his teeth. "NO!" Little brown globules of coffee hung in the air varying in size from an eighth to a half an inch.

Weston waved a piece of cloth across the center of the room and absorbed most of them. Then he propelled the cloth toward the Captain. "You're dial is kinda wet, skipper."

Captain Fox caught the cloth and wiped his face. "I'll have no insubordination," he said as a matter of course. He sent the cloth back toward Weston then applied the syringe to his mouth. At a gentle pressure, coffee emerged and he drank it all.

Next he pulled out a shiny, metal tube about an inch in diameter. The tube telescoped in the center and he discovered that by applying a slight pressure, a ball of something oozed from one end. He put it in his mouth and found it warm with a pleasant, meaty flavor.

After the Captain's stomach was filled, he felt immensely better although he was inclined to brood somewhat over the mutiny of his crew.

"Food concentrates aren't bad, are they Ham?" Le Strange commented.

"Hmph," the Captain grunted, and propelled the bag back toward Weston.

Weston placed the bag in a compartment then turned to the Captain. "It's your turn to wash dishes but if you don't feel up to it, I'll do it for you."

The Captain went limp, his mouth agape. "Yo — you'll wash dishes for ME! Why — why — "

Weston grinned. "Okay, if you want to, skipper. I just thought you might not feel much like it." He gave a quick bound against the wall and sailed across the room. Before the Captain's frozen tongue could find words, he was gone.

Captain Fox turned to Le Strange. "Do YOU do dishes?"

"No, I'm off watch now," he replied. "It's my turn next mess."

The utter incongruity of it all left the Captain weak. "Never mind, never mind," he told himself. "Just wait till the Commission hears of this!"

At this point, Le Strange too bounded across the compartment, leaving the Captain alone.

Captain Fox sighed. "Well, I've got to play it their way," he murmured. "It's a wonder they haven't killed me outright. I'll work — I'll wash blame dishes — but when it comes to a showdown, they'll pay for this!"

Captain Fox had never before experienced what he called mutiny, yet it called up some associations which were almost, but not quite, over the threshold of conscious thought. He hauled himself over to the commis-

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sary unit and fed utensils into the cleanser and took them out again while he thought. He was fastening a syringe to one of the wall clips when he recalled something. It was a mutiny he'd heard about, but where? Not someone he knew.

"Hmmmm," he mused. Still the elusive thought remained beyond his grasp. When he had finished, he made his way back to the control room. Underhill was seated in the pilot's seat.

"Going to take over now?" the older man asked.

"Will you trust me with it?" the Captain asked acidly.

Underhill grinned and climbed out of the chair. "Well," he said, stretching, "I guess I'm off watch now." He pulled the log book out of his pocket and passed it to the Captain. "I assigned the watches while you were unconscious and kept everything up to date."

"Thank you," Captain Fox replied, not the least bit thankfully. He sat down and fastened the strap. After Underhill had closed and dogged the hatch, he opened the log book. While thumbing through it, he discovered that there were twenty-two escort vessels carrying dignitaries of all kinds, all of which could reach the ship within twenty minutes.

"Hmm, bet they haven't thought of this," he murmured. If he could only reach the signalling equipment, one of the escort vessels could help him put down this mutiny in a matter of minutes, but where was the signalling equipment? The radar reflectors for meteor detection were beside him. He studied everything and then his eyes fell on a rack in which there was a chart board. He snatched the board out of its rack and there was the ship all laid out. It took him no time at all to find the tiny cubicle marked, Signalling Equipment.

It could be reached from either the companionway or the navigator's cabin. He'd have to wait until he was sure Le Strange was asleep. While he waited, he turned over in his mind the message he would send announcing the incredible mutiny. At last, satisfied that Le Strange was asleep, he carefully pulled himself to the hatchway and undogged it. He opened the door a crack and listened. There was no sound except the whine of air blowers which he hoped would mask the noise of his movements.

He left the entrance to the control room wide open and with infinite care, inched his way down the companionway to the door of the signal room. With even greater care, he undogged it and eased himself inside. It was empty and the door leading to the navigator's cabin was closed and dogged.

When Captain Fox was convinced that he had not been heard, he made his way to the large, square transmitter. It was unfamiliar to him but the controls were plainly marked. After a moment's study, he snapped on a switch and from within the boxlike machine came a faint humming sound.

It took several more minutes to obtain what appeared to be the proper adjustments and since he expected discovery at any moment, he decided to give it a try. Placing his lips close

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to the fixed microphone, he said, "Call — "

The brazen clanging of alarm bells drowned out his words and they echoed the length of the ship. With frantic haste, the Captain sprang through the open hatchway, hitting the wall of the companionway heavily. He literally flung himself into the control room and toward the pilot's seat. Uppermost in his mind was the fact that somehow the signalling equipment had been wired to prevent him from making his plea, but a frosted glass plate in the center of the instrument panel told him otherwise. It was glowing brilliantly white and in the center was a small, black ring and almost in the center of this was a red dot.

"Meteor!" he gasped. He released the control wheel from its lock and pulled it a quarter of a turn. The red dot moved almost imperceptibly. It was close, too close! Taking a deep breath, he spun the wheel several complete turns, trying to brace himself against the pressure. He held the wheel tight with both hands as he felt the chair being torn away from under him. The red dot was out of the black ring now and crawling toward the edge of the plate. He pulled one hand free and tried vainly to hold onto the chair as he spun the wheel back. His hold slipped and once again he felt his body fly through the air and strike heavily against the wall.

Through a red haze, he saw Underhill crawling through the door sideways then blackness overcame him.

Captain Fox felt as though he were floating through something or on something and then suddenly he realized he was standing on the deck of an old fashioned sailing ship. A man below the quarter-deck waved his sword at him. "Surrender, Captain Bligh!"

"You've got me!" Captain Fox replied, "but I've not given up, Mr. Christian! You haven't seen the last of me!"

The face of Fletcher Christian immediately changed into that of Joe Underhill and the sword became a huge wrench. His hair was tightly braided and hung down his back in a little pigtail. It was tied at the end with a bit of cord.

Regally, Captain Fox descended from the quarter-deck.

"Goodbye, skipper," somebody called.

The Captain turned and glared at Max Weston. He had a black patch over one eye and a bandana over his head. In his hand was an old pistol which he waved menacingly toward the Captain.

"Shoot and be damned, you mutineer!"

"Go on, get moving!" another voice ordered, thrusting a cutlass toward him. It was Le Strange, wearing a three cornered hat.

"Yeah, get moving!" Underhill, alias Fletcher commanded.

They shoved him onto a small plank which led over the side.

"Start walking!" Underhill ordered.

Grimly, the Captain walked to the end of the plank then stopped. "I'm leaving!" he bellowed, "but I'll be

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back, Mr. Christian! I'll be back!!" The last words turned into a scream as the plank seemed to dissolve under him and he was falling, falling, falling.

He was still falling when his eyes opened. Then he realized he wasn't falling but floating.

Joe Underhill was near by, looking at him from an odd angle. "Feel better now, skipper?"

"Oooooohhh," Captain Fox groaned. "I'll be back Fletch — I mean, I'll have no insubor — "

"Ah, you sound like your old self."

Then the Captain remembered the meteor. "Did we miss it?"

"We missed it," Underhill replied. "What happened?"

"I was in the sig — " He clamped his mouth shut. He studied Underhill's solicitous face and thought of his dream. Slowly a smile spread across his countenance as he pictured Underhill in knee-length pantaloons and his hair pulled back in a pigtail. The grin became a chuckle and then he laughed. "Fletcher Christian!" he roared. His sides began to ache from his mirth but he couldn't stop. It was just too ridiculous.

Underhill's face was twisted up into an expression of anxiety. He clenched his hands together helplessly.

Gradually Captain Fox's convulsions began to subside and Underhill relaxed a little. "Are you sure you're all right, Captain?"

"I — I guess I am," the Captain replied, still smiling. He pulled himself toward the pilot's seat. "I'll finish my watch, Joe."

With a puzzled frown, Underhill propelled himself to the hatchway.

Captain Fox turned to look at him again. "Fletcher Christian!" he snorted and began to laugh again.

Hesitantly, Underhill went through the companionway. "You're sure you're all right, sir?" he called back.

"I think so," Captain Fox replied, "and forget the SIR stuff."

"You ain't all right," Joe Underhill murmured and slammed the hatch.

Captain Fox decided to tell him about it later, maybe at the next mess. Right now he had a lot to think about. He turned to the controls and adjusted the ship back on its course.

Some days later, the Prometheus screamed into the upper atmosphere of Venus and began to brake down rapidly. Many thousands of people were on hand to witness the landing and millions more, both on earth and Venus, were watching its descent in videos. In hushed silence, the spectators scanned the sky above, waiting for the first speck that would announce the arrival of the Prometheus for the second time in a hundred years. When it was finally sighted, a great shout went out in greeting and it settled lower and lower toward the vast, new field on which no ship had ever landed before.

It seemed to hang over the field for a moment, the roar from its reaction engines filling the air and then at last, its heavy shock absorbers hit the ground and the flight was over. The escort ships roared down, circling overhead in a great display, waiting for the ribbon which stretched across the field to be cut.

The little group emerged from the

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Prometheus and walked to the big ribbon about a hundred meters from the stand on which the officials were waiting. They saw Captain Fox take the gleaming shears from his pocket and video men held their instruments close.

However, at the last moment Captain Fox did an unusual thing for he pressed the shears into the big hand of Joe Underhill and pushed him toward the ribbon. Millions of people waching and listening heard Joe Underhill say, "Nix skipper, it's your job!" And hundreds of shocked, unbelieving people who either knew Captain Fox or knew of him, heard him reply, "Go on, you big lout, cut it or I'll hang one on you!"

Millions more are still puzzling, if they think of it at all, about the answer to a question put to Captain Fox. An official asked, "To what do you owe your success, Captain Fox?" And Captain Fox had replied with a grin, "To Fletcher Christian."

They had no chance to question him further for the four walked nonchalantly off the field, each with his share of dust, grease and dirt, his uniform torn, and one had a bandage on his head.

THE END

NEWS OF THE MONTH

(Concluded from page 29)

tumes. There will be everything you could ask for for the time of your life.

Convention Chairman is Don Day, founder of the PSFS and well known in the fan field as Editor of the fanzine, The FANSCIENT. He is forty years old and has been active as a reader and collector for over twenty five years. During the past four years he has been active in organized fandom. Secretary Juanita Sharp is a comparative newcomer to fandom having joined the PSFS only last summer, though she has been a reader of science fiction for several years. Robert Wever, a student at the University of Oregon Medical School, has taken over the post of Treasurer following Ruth Newbury's resignation. Other members of the Portland group include Ralph Rayburn Phillips, whose ultra weird art is well known to fans as is that of Jerry Waible, who has been a member of the PSFS since the second meeting; Forrest Davis and Ruth Newbury, his wife; Mona Sheller, another medical student; Jim Bradley, the NORWESCON's Teen-Age Greeter, Joe Salta, well-known collector of fantasy; and Dale Donaldson and Stu (Tiny) Oliver, two of the biggest fans in fandom. Then there's Bill Bullard who controls soil or some such for the Forest Service and Gil and Grace Williams who got married a few months after being introduced at a PSFS meeting.

Each year a new organization is set up to put on the current convention. The funds to take care of the preliminary arrangements come entirely from the memberships in the Convention committee. Membership in the NORWESCON COMMITTEE costs $1 and in addition to the satisfaction of knowing that you've done your part to support science fiction's top annual event, your dollar will bring you the following: A membership card, lithoed on a special fluorescent stock that is one of the most striking cards you have ever seen; a supply of gummed stickers advertising the NORWESCON (8 designs) together with a couple of souvenir proof sheets of the sticker designs; copies of the NORWESCONEWS, the official fanzine, telling of events as they take place; a copy of the Souvenir Norwescon Program Book. The first issue of NORWESCONEWS is now ready, an 8-page lithographed pamphlet telling all about the convention, the hotels, transportation, the hall and many other things, as well as listing the names and addresses of all the members up to the time of going to press. All members will be listed in the NORWESCONEWS as they join.

Send your dollars for membership to NORWESCON, Box 8517, Portland 7, Oregon—and come on out for the time of your life!

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PERSONALS

Roger N. Dard, 232 James Street, Perth, Western Australia will buy or trade the following books, but they must be in pocket-book form: Avon Book of Crime and Detective Stories, The Decameron (Boccaccio), I Am Gazing into My 8-Ball (Earl Wilson), and Daughter of Fu Manchu (Rohmer) . . . All fans in Southwest Washington are asked to get in touch with Tom Daniel at Brown-Elmores, Aberdeen, Wash. or with Bill Weeks, 608 W. 1st St., Aberdeen, Wash. A new fan group is being formed, no age or other membership limits . . . The Cocheco Libraries, 16 Niles St., Dover, N. H. have prints of a hitherto unpublished Bok picture copies of which can be obtained for only one dime . . . Ralph H. Harding, 38 Central Ave., Maylands, Western Australia wants copies of American promags, particularly OTHER WORLDS, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, AMAZING STORIES and non-fantasy mags such as EYEFUL and NUDE ART. Will also welcome letters from American fans . . . Alan Henderson, 211 W. 108th St., New York 25, N. Y. would like the dust jackets from "The New Adam" by Weinbaum and "Sword in the Stone" by T. H. White . . . Fans in or around Grand Rapids, Michigan interested in forming a fan club should contact W. R. Clack, 811 Royal Oak, SW, Grand Rapids 8, Mich. . . . Donald R. Willson, North Reading State Sanitarium, North Wilmington, Mass. would like copies of AS containing "Prometheus II" and "Star Kings" . . . If any fans in Newark, Ohio or surrounding territory would like to form a fan-club, write Dick Ryan, 224 Broad St., Newark, Ohio . . . Seattle's NAMELESS ONES proudly present SINISTERRA, the newest member of the Fanzine Family; 25c/copy, first issue now available. SINISTERRA, 3200 Harvard N, Seattle 2, Wash. . . . Gerry de la Ree, 277 Howland Ave., River Edge, N. J. has several hundred fan magazines ('40-'49) that he'll trade for old issues of aSF, Unknown, FFM or Weird Tales. Also wants THE SHUNNED HOUSE, Lovecraft, 1928; THE EYE AND THE FINGER, Donald Wandrei, 1944; original cover paintings or black and whites by Finlay and Bok . . . Texas fans interested in forming a state fan club write Neil Wood, Route 2, Corsicana, Texas. Neil also would like to buy or trade for back issues of OW, aSF and Magazine of Fantasy . . . Zoe Ferguson, 525 S. 60th St., Tacoma 8, Wash. would like stfans in and around Tacoma interested in forming a fan club to get in touch with her . . . Ben Pugsley, Rt. 3, Box 148C, Marysville, Calif. would like to correspond with some fans . . . Wanted, by F. J. Ackerman, 236½ N. New Hampshire, Hollywood 4, Calif., books THE MIGRANT OF THE STARS, ARTIFICIAL GIRL, ZARLAH THE MARTIAN, Hall-Flint's THE BLIND SPOT (in German), Merritt's THE LIGHTNING WITCH (in Russian), THUKA OF THE MOON, FILMS OF TIME, CUPID NAPOLEON; prozines 7 Days, Thrill Book, Orchideengarten, Fantastica, No. 2 WT, Canadian WTs with Brundage covers, fanmag Fantasy Mag (issues dedicated to WT and Scientifilms); scenes from Trans-Atlantic Tunnel, High Treason, Radiomania, Our Heavenly Bodies, Just Imagine, Frau im Mond, Island of Lost Souls, Mysterious Island, Aelita, Revolution on Mars and Mandragore Alraune; information on the whereabouts of Roy J. Leckrone, Paddy Fitz-Gerald Grattan, Leslie F. Stone, Francis Stevens, Howie Long, Elliott Dold Jr., Geo. Romani, Frank Sipos, Geo. Barrish, Yodko Mihalivitch; time-machine to go back to 1900 and pick up mint copies of the missing items I need . . . Weaver Wright, Box 6151, Metro Sta., Los Angeles 55, Calif. will trade Miracle Science Stories, Shadow Over Innsmouth, Weapon Makers, Clayton Astoundings, Bradbury's fanmag and other collectors' items for—what rarities have you? Outlandi, 15c; Extra-Terrestrial, 25c; Hymn to Satan, 15c; Mystery of the 33 Stolen Idiots, Keller, 35c; Monsters of the Moon, 25c; Fan Artists Portfolio, 50c; Fanciful Tales (Lovecraft, Howard, Wollheim), $1; Bok Artfolio, $1.25 . . . Wanted: first issue magazines (no cowboy or detective) to buy or trade. Also want stf and comic books and mags published before 1942. Will trade first issues of Life, Pageant, Coronet, 47, etc. as well as stf mags and books going back to the early 20's. Would also like foreign stf, photography and jazz mags or books. Write Bill Deppe, 12 S. 6th St., Wilmington, N. Car. . . .

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HOLES IN MY HEAD

Buried deep in your mind is that faculty known as the subconscious—but what is it, really? Scientists today are drilling holes in the skull and awakening that subconscious electrically . . .

I PULLED the letter out of my pocket, looked at it, and then looked at the number on the mail box. They were the same. I looked across the stretch of weedpatch at the front of the house, taking in the broken window patched with cardboard, and the lap siding which looked like it had never been painted. I shifted my gaze to the roof which had one whole corner of shingles stripped spottily, resembling a man's balding head.

I tried to associate this run down place with the Paul Fairness I had known in college — and couldn't.

A possible explanation occurred to me. Paul must live in the neat cabin off in the woods that I noticed about a quarter of a mile in back of the shanty. This was the nearest mailbox, so he used it for an address. That would be it.

I drove my car down the dirt driveway. From the weeds growing there, it was obvious the driveway hadn't been used for a long time.

As my car neared the house I was able to get a partial view of the back yard. It was fenced in with chicken wire six feet high, which was tightly held to straight two-by-four frames. The section I could see was tied to the corner of the house. Whoever had built that fence had done a professional job that was completely out of keeping with the house.

Something came into view in that fenced-in back yard. At first I thought it was some species of monkey or baboon, then I recognized it as an Afghan Hound.

The dog walked with slow deliberation to the fence where it could look in my direction. It was not using its right front leg. He dragged the leg as though it were paralyzed, rather than holding it up like a dog usually does when its leg is injured.

What particularly attracted my attention was a white covering that hugged the dog's cranium with small metal studs forming a dotted circle around the top of the skull, to which the white covering was fastened.

I stopped the car beside the house and climbed out. The Afghan Hound wagged his tail in a friendly greeting, panting as if to say hello.

There was still no one in sight and the windows were too dusty to see inside. I went over to the fence, squatted down, and stuck my fingers through the chicken wire mesh. The dog licked them, shaking his body happily.

I studied the paralyzed front leg.

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By
ROG
PHILLIPS

Illustration by Bill Terry

The paw was worn raw from dragging. It glistened with fresh blood, yet it seemed to give the creature no discomfort.

I worked my fingers in a caressing manner along the dog's jaw, and got him to turn his head enough so that I could touch the small screw heads. They seemed to be imbedded right in the head.

By using my other hand to scratch the dog's shoulder, I was able to push the white cloth covering up far enough to see under it.

Instead of flesh or bone, there was a transparent dome through which I could see the convolutions of the creature's brain.

Things clicked in my mind. I had read of a similar thing in Life Magazine years before. It described studies on apes with their craniums removed and plastic ones substituted so that the brain could be observed at all times. As much as I hated to admit it, this pointed conclusively to the run-down shack being Paul's place, because he had studied to be a surgeon, and had dreamed of a life of pure research in surgery and anatomy.

Suddenly, I became aware of someone standing behind me. I turned my head and looked up. It was Paul Fairness — or at least I was sure it was until I saw the light in his eyes and the expression on his face.

Instead of a friendly smile of welcome, or even some indication of recognition, there was instead a look of hostility that one might express toward a perfect stranger who had invaded the premises without being invited. Or was the hostility due to recognition?

"Who are you?" he said, his voice filled with ill-concealed anger.

"Have I changed that much in ten years, Paul?" I asked with a smile I intended to be disarming.

"My name isn't Paul," he answered. "You've got the wrong address."

"But I haven't," I said, wondering if it were a joke dictated by a crudely distorted sense of humor. Suddenly, on impulse, I decided to play along. "Aren't you Paul Fairness? Of course, I don't remember him too well. It's been ten years since I saw him last. I came because of this letter."

I took out the letter and extended it toward him. He made no effort to take it, but continued to stare at me in an unfriendly manner. I shrugged my shoulders and put the letter back in my pocket. It was getting me down a little now. Maybe this was a game — Paul was playing the hostile stranger with deadpan seriousness in an attempt to get under my skin, and when I blew up he'd break down and have a good laugh.

Well, there was one way to beat him at his own game and make him break down. I'd play a similar game, and sooner or later he wouldn't be able to resist trying to make me out a liar.

Abruptly I changed my entire manner and became brusquely business-like.

"Since you aren't Paul Fairness," I said, "I'll be frank with you. I'm a private investigator from a Chicago detective bureau. We want him for absconding with several thousand dol-

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lars from a relief fund eight years ago. We don't have any picture of him, or much information to go by but, we got a tip that he was living at this address, and I came down to check on it. Since we don't know what he looks like, the only way to trap him would be to pretend to be an old friend and get him to make a slip that would let me know for sure it was him."

"Who gave you to the tip?" he asked suspiciously — so genuinely that for a moment I was almost sure it couldn't be Paul.

"The mailman," I said glibly. "We send out wanted notices to all the postoffices, you know."

"Well," he said with his first sign of waning hostility, "I guess Paul Fairness lived here before I did. I sort of guessed he might be an escaped criminal, because he left this dog behind, and a lot of his stuff. I've been keeping the dog because I hated to kill it, and the clothes he left behind fit me. I've been here just a couple of weeks now."

"It's been a long drive down here," I said. "Mind if I come in and rest a while?"

He hesitated for an instant, then turned without a word and walked toward the front of the house. I took this to mean acquiescence and followed him. The Afghan Hound whined softly as I left, seemingly asking me to stay with him a little longer.

"Sit there," my guest said, jabbing his finger toward a worn chair near the door. "I'll fix you some coffee. There's no room here for you to stay, but I don't think you want to since you didn't find who you came after."

Slightly indignant, I sat down.

He was back in less than two minutes with a cup of hot coffee, a can of milk that had a dried crust around the holes, and a bowl of sugar with a caked spoon in it.

He stood over me silently while I put cream and sugar in the coffee and stirred it with the crusted spoon. I did not indicate with the slightest sign that it nauseated me. When I lifted the cup to take the first swallow of the stuff he turned and went back into the kitchen, and returned at once to sit down in a chair across the room.

"It isn't too hot," he said shortly, "you can drink it faster if you want."

Resentment flared inside of me again. I took a couple of deep gulps and set the cup down on the arm of the chair, then stood up.

"Hope you find him," he said, taking his cue quickly. "Good-bye."

I stared at him a brief second, almost tempted to blow up and let him win his little, malicious game. Then I turned abruptly and went out to the car.

I climbed in and started the motor, expecting him to run out momentarily with a big grin on his face and call the whole thing off. But as I backed slowly out to the road there was no sign of movement from the house.

Once on the road I let my motor idle for a minute or two, looking toward the house, not sure of myself. Then I slipped into gear and as I started back toward town my thoughts were very confused.

My thoughts were confused for a

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very good reason. I knew that in this world everyone has a double or two — who can be mistaken for him even by close friends.

Paul had been my roommate for two years of college, and even ten years hadn't obliterated from my memory the exact contour of a little halfmoon scar on his neck, the peculiarities of a scar on the back of his right hand where a wart had been removed with nitric acid, and the narrow, inch long bald line on the nape of his neck.

Those things, impossible of accidental duplication, told me beyond shadow of doubt that the man who had treated me in such an unwelcome manner was Paul Fairness.

Why I hadn't confronted him with this and broken him down, I didn't know. Perhaps it was the dead seriousness of his manner and his insistence that he was not Paul — in direct contradiction to his urgent insistence that I come, in his letter.

My impulse for the first mile back to town was to forget the whole thing and go back to Chicago, but as my car drew closer to the town ahead, a reluctance to let this thing hang in the air grew on me. I decided to rent a room in the hotel and stick around until I could make some sense out of the situation.

The hotel was a three story frame affair, with a grocery store, drug store, and cafe occupying the street front. I parked my car in front of the cafe and climbed the narrow stairs, which were sandwiched between the cafe and the drugstore. They led to the second floor lobby which was little more than a wide place in the hall with a counter, behind which sat an old woman.

She eyed me suspiciously and asked if I were alone, then sneered doubtfully when I said I was. I got a room in the back, with a window which was obscured by steam from a laundry in the next building. The three dollars I had been required to pay in advance for one day's rent would have bought the furniture and the rug. If there had been a sign on the wall saying Washington slept there I would have believed it.

I went down to my car to get my bags. While getting them out of the trunk compartment I glanced through the window of the cafe and noticed a pretty waitress. My room was depressing, so I decided to put off unpacking and get something to eat.

The waitress was even prettier than she had appeared through the window. In a city she would have had a better job, but in Blake the cafe job was probably the best to be had.

She smiled and handed me a menu. I didn't bother to read it, but ordered a small steak with coffee, and smiled back at her.

By the time my steak was ready I knew that the waitress' name was Norma Williams, and that she liked me. By the time I had eaten, I knew that she had always wanted to visit Chicago sometime, because she had an aunt living there.

I was on my third cup of coffee when I brought up the subject of Paul.

"Do you know a fellow living on

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the outskirts of town by the name of Paul Fairness?" I asked.

"Paul?" she asked. Her smile clouded into a troubled frown. "Yes, I know him. He used to come in and eat once in a while."

"Used to?" I mocked good naturedly.

She turned away and filled a coffee cup at the urn, carried it around the end of the counter, then sat down beside me. It gave me a strange thrill to have her sitting so close. When she turned to look at me her eyes were troubled.

"Paul used to go with my older sister Mary" Norma said. "About ten days ago they had a date. He didn't call for her, so she took Dad's car and drove out to his place, thinking he might be sick. He, or someone just like him, pretended not to know her, and as much as told her to get out and stay out. Mary insists it was Paul, but it doesn't sound like him. I'd stake my bottom dollar that if he were to give her the brushoff he'd be decent about it — and besides I'm sure he was deeply in love with her."

So Paul had been in love with Norma's sister, Mary. Had been? Why was I thinking of him in the past tense — as though he were dead? The thought so disturbed me that for a moment I forgot about Norma.

"Paul was my best friend in college," I said. She had twisted a little on the stool she was sitting on, so that her knee rested against mine. It was hard to think of anything other than her.

"Then you came here to see him?" she said hopefully. At my nod of agreement she hurried on. "Then maybe you can find out what's come over him when you go out to see him."

"I've been out to see him," I said. "He gave me the same kind of brushoff — and he had written me a letter inviting me to come down."

I took the letter out of my pocket and gave it to her. She read it thoughtfully, a frown of concentration on her face. I watched her, thinking how pretty she would look in a trim kitchen of her own with airy windows and bright colors.

"This is Paul, all right," she said, laying the letter on the counter absently. "It was written two weeks ago, from the date. He didn't say anything about writing you though."

Her lips quivered, and her eyes were suddenly bright with tears.

"Here now," I said soothingly, putting my arm around her shoulders.

She regained her composure and apologized for the outbreak, then picked up her cup and sipped slowly.

"You must think it's me that's in love with Paul," she said suddenly, turning her eyes on me again.

"Heaven forbid!" I said in alarm. I grinned when I caught the twinkle in the corner of her eye. Then she became serious.

"I suppose you'll be going back to Chicago," she said, "now that Paul won't let you visit him."

"Hm-mm," I shook my head emphatically. "I've rented a room in the hotel. I'm going to stick around until I find out what's wrong with him."

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Another customer came in, so I drank some more coffee while she waited on him. I was grateful for the fact that he was in a hurry. He drank his coffee and ate his cheese sandwich in less than ten minutes, and left.

"Look," I said when he was gone, "what time do you get through work, Norma?"

"Seven o'clock," she said hesitantly.

"I'd like to go home with you and talk to your sister," I said. "I think something's wrong with Paul, and she'd probably be in a better position to lay finger on it than you, or even I, as it's been ten years since I last saw him."

"All right," she said eagerly.

"I'll be down to eat dinner about six thirty," I said, "that way we'll be ready to go at the same time."

Norma glanced toward the kitchen.

"Why don't you wait?" she said softly so her voice wouldn't carry. "I don't eat until I get home, and you could have dinner with us."

"Swell," I said.

The Williams' house was just as I expected it would be. It was a well built, nice appearing house in a neat residential section, with a generous lawn and large tree. Mr. Williams was the typical small town business man, the solid citizen type. Mrs. Williams was more beautiful than the average small town housewife, which justified Norma's looks and figure.

Mary Williams, I could see at once, was taking her brushoff from Paul rather badly. There were dark blotches under her burning eyes that gave evidence of sleepless nights. At dinner she ate very little.

Norma had said nothing about my being a friend of Paul's. Mrs. Williams had set a huge piece of apple pie in front of me with orders to eat every crumb. When I finished the last bite, I looked across the table questioningly at Norma, who was more beautiful than ever in the nice dress she had hastily changed to as soon as we had arrived. She nodded imperceptibly. I folded my linen napkin carefully, lighted a cigarette, and sat back.

"I'm a friend of Paul Fairness," I said quietly.

An electric silence fell on the room at this announcement. Slowly, Mary turned her head until her eyes burned into mine.

"I just came down from Chicago this noon," I went on casually, as though nothing were amiss. "I went out to his place to see him — and received a very strange reception." I returned Mary's stare with a sympathetic smile. "In my opinion something's definitely wrong with him."

"Do you think so?" Mary asked breathlessly. "But — " she stopped, trying to choose her words. "What can it be? He isn't like an insane person. It's more like — he was — " She stopped, confused.

"It's more like he wasn't Paul?" I supplied the words.

"That's it," she said gratefully.

"It definitely isn't Paul," I said slowly. "By that, as you probably know, Mary, I don't mean it isn't a different person. It's Paul's body be-

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yond any shadow of doubt, but Paul himself is cut off from expression in some way. Maybe he's developed a split personality and the new personality has completely superceded the old. I'm not enough of a psychologist to know if that's possible. But — " I twisted in my chair and leaned toward her. "You probably know him much better than I do. That dog — was he engaged in some sort of research in brain surgery?"

"Yes, he was," she replied without hesitation. "It was fascinating. He let me see how he did some of it."

"Now, Mary," Mrs. Williams said warningly. "Not at the table."

I suggested that we go into the living room. There was a question raised about the dishes. Almost in less time than it takes to tell it Mr. and Mrs. Williams were out of the way, and I was perched on the edge of the kitchen table while Norma and Mary did the dishes.

* * *

"Did you see the dog up close?" she asked.

"Yes," I said. "It came to the wire and I managed to see that it had a plastic cranium, before Paul came out to see what I was doing."

"Did you lift the cloth cover and see the whole thing?" Mary asked. I shook my head. "I've seen it," she continued. "It's dotted with small openings with plugs in them that can be taken out. He was introducing some sort of anesthetic through these holes to freeze small areas of the brain to see what the effect would be."

"Did he try that on himself?" I asked sharply, sensing that this would explain the change in him.

"N-not that I know of," Mary said doubtfully.

"Hmm," I said thoughtfully, "it would seem to me that any deadening stuff he introduced that way would seep to the whole brain and act as a general anesthetic."

"It did, at first," Mary said, now absorbed in telling me all she knew about it. "He was working hard toward something in a medium almost insoluble in the brain fluids, so that its effect would be confined to one place, and the amount carried to other parts of the brain would be well below effective strength."

"That would mean that the area deadened would remain deadened for a long time," I suggested. She nodded.

"That's what he said," she agreed. "But that's what he wanted, so that he could study the effects of some particular part being cut off from the rest over a long period. It was fascinating. He showed me once. He had all the areas of the brain, and what they controlled, all mapped on a chart. He said his technique was the only one that could narrow things down to the finest pinpoint of the brain's surface."

"He used to talk for hours about what he hoped his research would do," she was saying. "One thing he hoped for was that it would be possible eventually to cure all forms of insanity in a few minutes by boring a fine hole at the right spot and lancing the cortex with a fine wire. Prefrontal lobotomy works by cutting a large

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section of the front part of the brain, when the insanity probably stems from one small spot that could be killed without damage to the other parts if there was some way of locating it."

"That would be something!" I said. "Instead of every state in the union having acres of buildings to house the insane, they could all be cured and set home in a matter of days."

"Not all," Mary corrected. "Paul said that it would probably be better just to anesthetize at first and watch the result, and if it was satisfactory, then cut. So it wouldn't be quite as simple as getting a tooth filled — but almost!"

"How long have you known him, Mary?" I asked.

"Oh," she sighed happily, "almost two years now. We were going to get married just as soon as he finished his experiment, sometime this summer, he expected."

"Do you know what I think?" I asked, lighting another cigarette.

Both Norma and Mary turned to hear my reply.

"I think," I said, "that Paul has done some experimenting he hasn't said anything about — and finally did it to himself to see what would happen."

"No!" Mary said. "He couldn't! That would mean — " I nodded.

"It would mean boring holes in his own head," I said.

"But actually," I went on hastily, "it wouldn't be as difficult as it seems. He probably has a special kind of drill setup, and can deaden the scalp and the bone, to a certain extent. He'd have to have a block around the drill to stop it from going too deep. If he did it at all, he would have everything down to the last decimal point before starting."

"If that's it," Mary said, her face tight with horror, "then something went wrong."

"Maybe not so wrong," I objected. "He would use the deadener rather than permanent cutting. When the stuff wears off he'll be himself again. How long did he say it takes for the stuff to wear off?"

"He once said twenty-four hours, more or less," Mary replied, "but he was trying to find something that would last longer in its effects."

"Then there's no way of telling how long it would be," I said. "The dog still had a paralyzed leg. Probably he used the stuff on the dog just in the spot that would paralyze that front leg, so he could see if it would last longer than a day. When it did, he used the stuff on himself." I shook my head in awe. "Imagine — paralyzing just one leg by deadening a spot in the brain itself!"

"But then he didn't wait," said Norma, who had been listening without comment up to now.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I mean," she said, "shouldn't he have waited until the effects wore off, so he'd know how long they would last — and be sure it wasn't permanent?"

"Of course he would," I said. "Or would he be so sure it would wear off that he just waited to be sure it

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would last longer than twenty-four hours? Whichever it is, we've got to do something about it. What, I don't know, but we can't just leave him out there to his own devices."

The vision of Paul's capable frame and hostile attitude weren't inviting. I didn't like the idea of forcing myself on whatever psyche had flowered inside that punctured skull of his. However, with two young ladies looking up to me to take things in hand, I couldn't very well take any other course.

"What I've got to do," I said, determined to talk myself into it, "is go out there and force him to let me stay and look out for him. If he refuses, then I'll have to tie him up and keep him under control until he unfreezes."

"I'm going with you," Norma said.

"Uh-uh," I shook my head. "There might be trouble. You girls had better stay out of it."

It was difficult to concentrate on driving, with Norma sitting so close beside me. I suspected she was sitting closer than Mary's width made necessary.

I drove as slowly as possible to prolong the agony, the agony of worrying about what lay ahead before the night was over.

"You know," I said, as we left the town, "I keep thinking of analogous things that make this look less serious than it did at first. Take getting drunk, for instance. Some people are the same drunk as they are sober. There are people, though, that have a mental black out when they get drunk. They go on their merry way, having a good time, and when they sober up they can't remember anything after the third drink or so. Sometimes when they black out like that they are totally different personalities than when they're sober. That's probably what has happened to Paul, I don't mean the drunkenness, but what has happened to his mind and personality. Maybe alcohol acts as a sort of spotty anesthetic and puts the ego center to sleep while a large part of the brain keeps on functioning, making the person seem the same — or at least awake."

"That could be," Mary said, a new interest in her tones. "Then Paul's driving me away would be nothing more serious than if he did it while drunk." She nodded to herself. "I think you're right."

"I can't remember him ever getting drunk in college," I said. "I don't know how he would behave, maybe just like he's behaving now."

"He doesn't drink," Mary said. "Maybe he did once and blacked out, but if he did, he's never said anything about it to me."

"How about you?" Norma asked, her eyes twinkling at me.

"I've never gotten that drunk," I said. Her lips were mere inches away from me.

"Look out!" Mary screamed.

I straightened up just in time to avoid a head-on collision. Norma's lipstick had a velvety feel where it was left on my lips.

Mary was looking from one to the other of us, trying to place the blame for the near collision.

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"— but if I ever get that drunk," I continued, "I'll probably behave the same."

Norma dipped her head in a nod. I laughed, and the two girls were quickly laughing with me.

We sobered when the headlights revealed Paul's mailbox. I felt a tight constriction in my throat as I headed the car off the road into the overgrown driveway.

There was a light in the front room window. It glowed like an inverted, fat letter L, due to the patch of square cardboard in the lower left hand section where the glass had been broken out.

I had a vision of Paul Fairness sitting in there all by himself, a glowering scowl on his face, itching for trouble like some drunks do, but without the inebriated lack of co-ordination that makes them so easy to manage. He would be dangerous, and all I had with me was two beautiful females to watch me fly through the air and land on my running board if I stuck my chin out too far.

I stopped the car a few feet from the front porch and shut off the motor.

"You girls had better wait here," I whispered, opening the door on my side. Before I had finished my statement the girls were out the other door.

The car doors closed with a soft click under their own impetus. Then I was at the door. I knocked. The girl's footsteps sounded on the porch as the door opened. From the rear of the house came a lonely, mournful howl.

Paul's features were in the dark as the door opened, but his shoulders were very broad and solid. Something glinted just below sight. I lowered my eyes and saw a blunt autom[illegible] in his fist.

"I was expecting you to come back after dark," he sneered. "Come on in. I've been waiting for you."

"Don't do anything foolish, Paul," I soothed, "Mary and her sister are with me." I regretted my words even as I spoke them. Mary or Norma might have had presence of mind enough to stay out of his line of vision and escape, to bring back the cops.

"I'm not Paul," Paul said. "You aren't going to frame me for any stealing Paul did, either. Step inside, all three of you."

"If you aren't Paul Fairness," I said stepping forward slowly, "who are you?"

He backed into the center of the room as the girls followed me in.

"Close the door," Paul said. I heard it slam at my back. Norma and Mary came into my range of vision, their faces were pale and frightened looking. Paul was waving his gun slowly in a way that kept us all covered.

"Who are you?" I asked again. When he didn't answer I went on. "I'll tell you," I said. "You don't know. You can't remember anything farther back than a week or ten days ago. You don't know who you are or where you came from."

From the look in his eyes I sensed that I had told the truth and he knew it, but had no intention of letting me know it.

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"Of course I know who I am," he said defiantly, "but it's none of your business, you nosey private detective."

"You didn't tell me you were a detective!" Norma said, surprised.

"I'm not," I said. "When Paul didn't know me this noon, I thought he was kidding me, so I kidded right back. He didn't even know he had written me inviting me down here. Do you know why you don't remember, Paul?" I shot at him. "It's because your ego center has been put to sleep by those experiments you were conducting. You're like a drunk that has a different personality functioning in him when he's drunk. That's why I came back, and why the girl who loves you came along with me. We came to make you let us take care of you until that anesthetic wears off and you're yourself again."

His lips were working queerly. I sensed vaguely that I had said something better left unsaid, but I didn't know what.

"I know what you mean — now," Paul said. "I've been reading some of the notes lying around. You're right . . . I was Paul, but I'm not any more, and I don't intend to be."

"What do you mean?" Mary asked, her voice sounding strange.

"I mean that I'm me," Paul said, stubborn petulance in his tones. "If Paul comes back I'm not me, I'm dead. I don't want to die, and I don't have to."

"Of course you don't," I said soothingly. "Now that you exist, you won't die. When Paul wakes up you'll still be there. You're strong enough to keep from dying."

"Don't give me any of that," Paul said angrily. "I can't remember anything that happened before two weeks ago, but I know everything technical that he knew. Also I've read his notes. He knows just where to cut to destroy me so I'll never come back. The minute he wakes up and realizes I don't want to die, he'll get me. That's why I'm going to keep dropping the anesthetic where he is in the cortex and keep him asleep permanently. Maybe I'll even run the wire in and kill him. I haven't decided yet."

"No! No! " Mary said. She started to cry, miserably.

I stared at Paul, realizing now the full extent of what we had gotten into. This new personality in Paul's body was fully aware it was fighting for its very existence, and it had no more intention of giving in peacefully than I would have of committing suicide.

It knew all the answers. From its viewpoint I was a threat to its life, and it would shoot me to save itself. My throat was suddenly dry, the palms of my hands damp.

"Lie down on the floor on your stomach," he said, looking at me.

"What are you planning to do?" I asked.

"The girls are going to tie your hands and legs together," he said. "I'm staying back where I can get a good shot if you try anything."

I measured the distance separating us. It was too far to try anything. He could shoot me several times before I could get to him, and there

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was nothing within reach that I could use to throw at him.

I got down and laid flat on my stomach.

"There's rope on the table," Paul said. "You girls tie his wrists and ankles together, and be sure you do a good job or you'll wish you had."

A few minutes later I was tied. I tried to keep the ropes loose enough so that I could slip out of them later. He examined them after the girls finished, and tightened them too securely for that.

When he stepped away from me I rolled over and sat up. In that position I watched as Norma tied Mary, then Paul laid down his gun and tied Norma. I groaned in sympathy when she made a desperate try to fight back, and he slapped her viciously on the side of the face, leaving the prints of his fingers on her face.

Now that all three of us were securely bound, Paul sat down and looked at us broodingly.

"What will this get you?" I asked abruptly. "You can't keep us tied forever, you know."

"No," he said tiredly, "but I can put *you* to sleep — all three of you — and deal with three persons like myself, who haven't any memory and will believe what I tell them to believe." He said no more, but his eyes told us there was no hope.

He got up out of his chair, and crossed the room to a closed door. When he opened it and went in I caught a glimpse of white walls and gleaming cases. It was Paul's laboratory. The light flashed on.

He came out and crossed over to where I lay. He grabbed me by the feet and dragged me across the floor. My thoughts searched frantically for some way out.

I was dragged through the door onto the smooth rubber tiled floor of the laboratory. Paul closed the door, shutting off my last glimpse of Norma.

"Look, Paul," I said in a low voice, "you don't have to do this. I know how you feel. I give you my word I'll co-operate with you. I'll see to it that the girls agree to it too. Mary will be difficult, but between Norma and me we can manage her."

It was as if I hadn't said a word.

He dragged me to a sitting position so that my back was against a leg of an operating table, which was bolted to the floor. He took off his trouser belt, and ran it around my waist, then around the table leg. When he buckled the belt I was effectively secured.

My head, I found with growing horror and nausea, was even with the table surface.

I followed Paul's movements with my eyes as he went to a drawer and took out several wide roles of adhesive tape and laid them on the table.

His face expressionless and calm, he unrolled a yard of two-inch tape, held my head upright by grasping my hair, and wrapped the tape so that my neck was held against the table leg, but not tight enough to choke me.

I stretched my stomach muscles cautiously, in an attempt to snap the belt, but I couldn't.

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For what seemed an interminable length of time I heard Paul's feet scuffing around the room, breaking the long periods of deadly silence. Norma started to scream in the other room. With an indecipherable mutter Paul left the room, slamming the door. Mary's voice came, pleading. After a while there was nothing but silence.

It was horrible. Then, suddenly, like a bright light in the drakness, I thought of something. It was something I had read somewhere. What was it? I stilled my thoughts so as to bring out the memory.

Somewhere I had read that when a man blanks out while he is drunk, his subconscious takes over. The man who has little need of suppressing impulses while sober doesn't build up a sharp split between conscious and subconscious ego centers, and consequently behaves normally while dead drunk, even though he might not recall what went on afterwards.

Paul had repressed most of his natural urges during most of his lifetime, subordinating them to the pursuit of his researches in medicine and surgery.

I, on the other hand, had developed a sort of working camaraderie between my conscious and subconscious selves. A friend of mine had once said that he liked me, but thoroughly disliked my subconscious. Another friend had once jokingly remarked that I had a conscious I. Q. of around a hundred and fifty, and a subconscious I. Q. of six hundred.

The point was that Paul's subconscious mind, raised to the conscious level by the anesthetizing of the conscious center, was fulfilling a driving urge to stay there. My own subconscious mind in the same position, would not feel that selfish urge, since it thoroughly enjoyed its own hidden position and ability to remain withdrawn from whatever it wasn't interested in.

Paul might think he was gaining an ally by putting my conscious mind to sleep, but he would merely be dealing with a more dangerous adversary, one who could fool him and gain the upper hand quickly.

Paul returned and closed the door. He came toward me, then over to a cabinet, where he opened some metal doors.

My heart was pounding painfully against my ribs. I felt weak and limp, and would have slumped except for the fact that I was bound so securely I couldn't.

Heavy fingers touched my scalp, slid around, and caused my heart to race painfully. The moving fingers came to rest. There was a quick, sharp pain, and I knew that a needle had been jabbed into my scalp.

The fingers lifted away. I became short of breath and felt a moment of suffocating panic. I had stopped breathing for a moment.

My shoulders ached. They were tense with strain and wouldn't relax. The surge of optimism I had felt a brief moment before was fading.

I could detect a numbness starting to grow just inside the hairline above my forehead on the left side. The

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local was beginning to take effect.

A long moment later I felt the heavy fingers return, steady and unwavering. My heart was pounding again.

There was a sudden whirring noise that quickly rose to a shrill motor-whine. Immediately after I felt an awful pressure that was followed by a sensation of bone grinding on bone and it vibrated to the core of my soul. A disembodied thought told me it was the drill going through my skullcap to the brain. I was sicker than I had ever been in my life, and finally I gave way to unashamed sobbing. The grief of the hopeless settled into me like swirling eddies in the depths of some cosmic ocean.

The whining vibration stopped. Time stopped with it for an eternity. Then heavy fingers were moving in my scalp once more. They rested. Their pressure increased to the point of painfulness.

I became aware that I was sleepily rubbing my eyes. The sensation clashed with the memory that arms had been bound to my sides and it brought me to full consciousness. I smiled inwardly at the realization that I had never known when the needle went into the fine hole drilled in my scalp and injected the deadening drug that put me to sleep.

Without opening my eyes I let my arm fall back. I was in a bed. I let that realization soak in; then I opened my eyes. A soft blue ceiling met my gaze. I turned my head idly and saw that I was in a strange bedroom.

A gray haired woman, dressed only in bra and panties, had her back to me. I gasped audibly in surprise. She turned her head. It was Norma's mother.

Seemingly unaware of my surprised stare and unconscious of her undress, she smiled at me.

"So you're awake finally, Rog," she said. "Better get up."

"Y-y-yeah," I stuttered. Then frantically I said, "Where's Norma?"

"Out in the kitchen," Mrs. Williams said. She flashed me a smile and slipped a dress over her head, shaking her body to get it to come down. When it was in place she zipped it, then fixed me with a frowning glance. "Well," she said with half humorous sharpness. "Get up!"

I continued to stare at her while she stepped into some slippers, left the bedroom without a backward glance.

I took a deep, shuddering breath, and wondered what kind of household I'd gotten into, then I slid out of bed. There were some bedroom slippers. I slid my feet into them. I had on a pair of slick pajamas.

A red bathrobe was slung over the back of a chair. I put it on, and looked around for the bathroom door. There were only two doors, the one Mrs. Williams had gone through to the kitchen, and a partly opened closet door.

I stepped toward the door to the kitchen. As it cracked open, a bedlam of voices erupted on my ears. I pulled the door wide open and I was in a short hallway without end doors. To

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my right a few feet away the kitchen began.

In what I could see of it there were several young people of all ages, from a ten-year-old boy to a twenty year old girl.

I caught sight of Norma. She was wearing a cheery red checked housedress that set off her figure to perfection.

"Norma!" I exclaimed in relief, stepping into the kitchen, and discovered more of the young people. At the sound of my voice, she looked up from a bowl that contained something she was stirring.

The thoughtful frown that had creased her smooth forehead vanished, to be replaced by a bright smile.

"Morning Pop," she said.

Her words, and the way she immediately started stirring whatever was in the mixing bowl again, brought me to a halt as abruptly as if I had run into a wall.

I looked about the kitchen dazedly while other voices echoed Norma's, "Morning Pop." There were at least a dozen, the youngest about eight-years-old.

My eyes finally came to rest on Mrs. Williams' back, where she stood by the electric range frying hotcakes. I looked around until I saw a mirror fastened to a cabinet door.

I went over and looked in the mirror, knowing before I looked what I would see. It was the serious, dazed face of an old man that stared back at me.

I turned away, and glanced back at the middle-aged woman by the stove, and my thoughts recalled how she had dressed in front of me in the bedroom. No wonder she had. She was the Norma Williams I had last seen tied hand and foot in that old house when Paul dragged me into the laboratory.

So it had taken all this time for the deadening drug to wear off, and no one had suspected my conscious mind was asleep all the time. They probably hadn't seen any difference in me.

I leaned weakly against the counter at my back and slowly counted the roomful of kids. There were fourteen of them. My eyes dimmed with tears as I realized all I had missed.

Somewhere in the deep reaches of my mind I heard something chuckling. My œ%$#&* subconscious mind!

"I'm going over to Uncle Paul and Aunt Mary's after school today," a twelve-year-old girl said, slipping her hand in mine.

I closed my eyes for a minute, then opened them and smiled ruefully down at her upturned, trusting face.

"O. K., honey chile," I said cheerfully, stooping down to pick her up. I squeezed her little body against my chest and kissed her. Her little arms went around my neck, and sent a thrill down my spine.

THE END

GOING TO THE NORWESCON?
SEPTEMBER 1-4, 1950
Read the News of the Month in this issue for complete details.

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THE STARTING OVER

By HODGE WINSELL

Snips and snails and puppy dogs' tails; that's what little boys are made of. Sugar and spice and everything nice; that's what little girls are made of— But what are Martians made of? — that's the question.

SAM BAKER dropped the carton he was holding, pounded a gnarled fist on the fat man's desk, and shouted, "If you'll just give me some metal and a few pieces of wire, I'll fix it up so you can land a spaceship on Mars."

The uniformed man behind the desk shook his massive head. "Sorry, Mr. Baker."

"Just a few scraps," begged Sam.

The man shook his head again. "It's impossible," he said, "unless . . ." His pig-like eyes took stock of Sam's rough clothing. "It's impossible."

"I have fifty credits with me," offered Sam, when he recognized the look as one he'd seen often before in his fifty-eight years.

"Mr. Baker! Are you trying to bribe the Allocator of Metals!"

"Ain't enough, huh?" said Sam.

The man in kahki, who had referred to himself as the Allocator of Metals, didn't bother to answer the old man; he put his finger against a buzzer on his desk. Sam was afraid he was going to be arrested. The desire to possess metal and wire was an act of treason in this plastic year, 1978. His fear vanished when a transparent, plastic robot which was mounted on a rectangular platform, rolled into the room.

"Archie," said the Allocator of Metals, "show Mr. Baker out. Like so many other of our historical figures he is still living in the age of steel and iron."

"I'm going," said Sam; he bent to retrieve the carton he had dropped and a shiny object caught his eye so he grabbed it also. As he moved towards the door, a bell started to ring, and the fat executive shouted, "Grab him, Archie."

The robot leaned forward on his platform and his sponge-covered fingers clamped on Sam's skinny shoulder and almost tore the out-dated blue coveralls he was wearing. Sam was lifted in the air and carried back to the desk and a search by the robot produced the letter-opener he'd tried to smuggle out of the office.

The fat man leaned back in his swivel chair and the letter-opener flew from one meaty hand to the other as he stared at Sam. Suddenly, he said, "What's in those cartons, Archie?"

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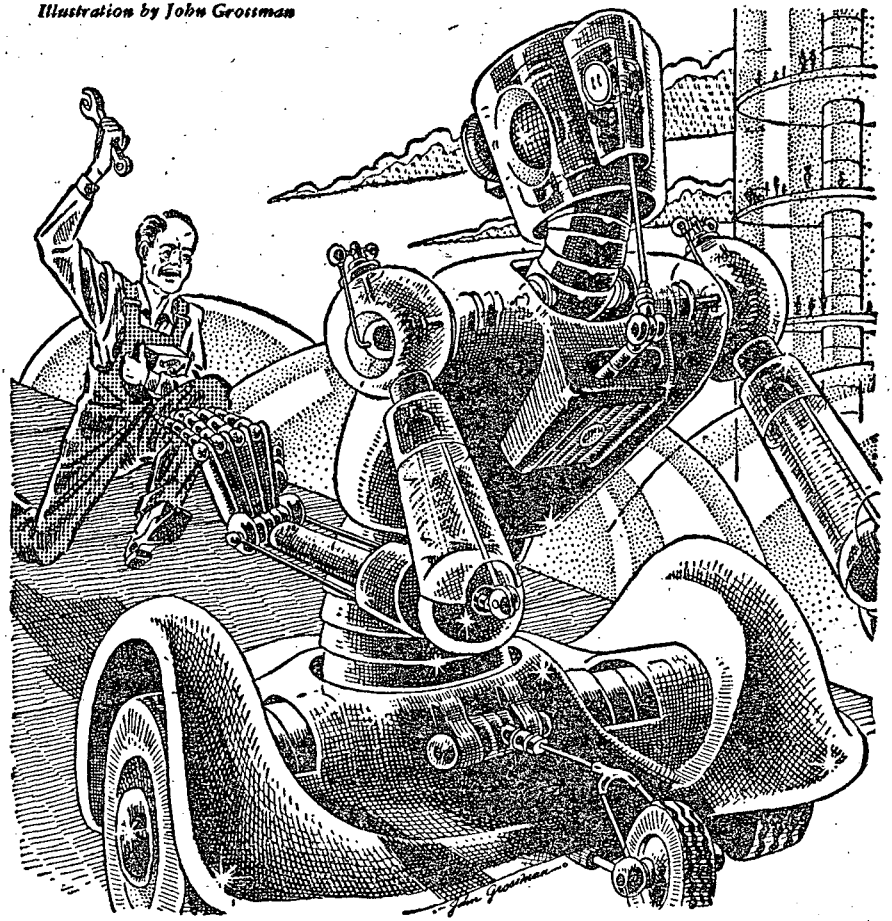
Illustration by John Grossman



The swirling discs that were Archie's eyes glowed green for just a second. Then, he said, "Dog food, thir."

"Grandpa," said the Allocator of Metals, "you want that metal pretty bad. I wish I had time to talk to you. When can you come back?"

Sam, who had never liked to be reminded that age was catching him short, didn't answer. He slammed out of the office and jumped on the conveyor belt which would deliver him near the field where the space derelicts were dumped after the usage had been graved out of them. He lived in one of the first ships to leave Earth and explored Venus, Jupiter, Saturn, Neptune and Pluto by proxy. They'd had the nerve to t[illegible] he was too old when they began to explore the stars. He'd told them a

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thing or two about staying alive on those cold planets though.

Sam became aware that he shouldn't be on the high speed conveyor; it wasn't good for him. The plastic wrench he was carrying bumped against his thigh and then almost tore the loop which was holding it. He shifted the carton of dog food from his right arm to his left and then moved over to a medium-speed belt. As he did, a gaunt, yellow-haired young man with blood-shot blue eyes sped past on the belt Sam had just vacated. Out of the corner of his thin-lipped mouth, the young man said, "Grandpa, there's a robot following you."

Sam lost his temper. "A fellow gets a few gray hairs and everyone starts calling him Grandpa!" he shouted at the young man's leather covered back, but the fellow didn't turn around. Sam remembered the man's words and turned to see Archie, the robot. "What do you want?"

"I'm a thpy."

Sam reached down and grabbed his wrench. "I'll fix you," he snarled, "I'll dismantle you."

The robot and Sam both tried to move in the opposite direction from the one the conveyor belt was going. The wheels of Archie's platform skidded like those archaic automobiles used to when they were on ice. Sam was running as hard as he could but he wasn't getting any place. He finally fell down and a laughing man picked him up . . . it was the blond stranger.

"Thanks," said Sam.

"So'kay, Grandpa. What's the trouble between you and this robot?"

"I'm a thpy," said Archie.

"Yeah," said Sam, "he's following me because I visited his boss today."

"Who's your boss, robot?" asked the young man.

"The Allocator of Metals," answered Archie. He bent over and opened a compartment in his platform. Sam was fascinated by the roll of credit notes the robot produced. Archie's eye discs turned a rose color and he said, "Exthpentheth."

Sam had to admit that the young man in the spaceman's garb had a quicker mind than he did. The blond pushed him to a sitting position on Archie's platform and then seated himself beside Sam, and said, "Lead on, MacRobot."

Archie rolled and the rounded plastic domes they passed were just a blur to Sam's eyes. To take his mind off of the excessive speed Sam stared at the man beside him. He had seen that face somewhere before. He was searching his memory when they slowed and then halted. Sam looked up to find out where he was and the sign caught his eye.

JINNEGAN'S
JUICE
JOINT
robots
welcome

"Thith ith it," said Archie.

Sam scowled. So the robot was going to get him charged up and then pump him, huh! He'd show that plastic punk! Then, he relaxed.

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What was he gunning his rockets about? He'd been trying to get somebody to listen to him for six months. In fact, he'd been trying ever since that Cox kid took off for Mars. Cox? Cox? Sam turned and looked at the blond young man. He pointed his finger and said, "You're Ted Cox."

The space pilot nodded, gloomily. "I'm trying to forget it but somebody always recognizes me."

Archie said, "Gentlemen, while we are thpending the ekthpenth money I want you to watch Mithter Jinneganth wig." He rolled through the door to the Juice Joint with the two men still riding on his platform. To the bushy, white-haired man behind the bar, the robot said, "Hello Mithter Jinnegan."

Jinnegan reached across the bar and shook a long finger under Archie's cube of a nose. He started to shout something at the robot but a blue spark jumped from Archie's nose and singed the barman's finger. "Thorry," said the robot, "thort."

Sam and Ted Cox laughed and Archie's eyes grew rosy as the proprietor of Jinnegan's cursed. Finally, the man said, "Whatt'llya have?"

"A Saturn Swizzle," said Ted Cox. While Archie unscrewed a plate behind the microphone that served as his right ear Sam ordered the same. Archie pointed at an exposed plug in his bucket-like head and said, "One hundred and ten volth, pleath."

Jinnegan savagely shoved an electric plug into the robot's head. Then, he filled two glasses with gray powder and motioned Sam and Tex Cox forward. When they had crowded close to the bar he lit two matches and dropped them in the glasses. The two men inhaled the smoke as the gray powder exploded. Sam found himself sitting in the middle of the floor. "Wh-wh-what happened?"

"You must have been thinking of flying," said Ted, "you tried to take off."

Sam snapped his fingers. He started to tell Ted what had been on his mind, but in a dreamy voice that was almost drowned out by the whir of cogs in his head, Archie said, "Mithter Jinnegan, have a drink."

The bartender nodded; he placed the palm of his right hand upon his head and then pressed as hard as he could on the top of his skull. "Thanks, Archie," he said, "I will."

Sam watched with fascination as the tall, white-aproned man produced a plastic toothpick and reached a long arm beneath the bar; there was a tiny dab of blue paste upon the end of the sliver when his hand came into view. Sam whispered, "What's that?"

"Neptune Nightmare," answered Ted.

Jinnegan stuck out a long pink tongue and drew the toothpick across it. His lean face grew a foot longer; his long nose protruded; the wig on the top of his head rolled up into a little ball. The look he radiated was horrified, but gee-but-that's-good. Sam and Ted laughed and the rosy glow disappeared from the robot's eye discs as he short-circuited.

As Archie replaced a fuse, Sam remembered what he had been going to tell the space pilot. He looked up at

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the young man and said, "I'm responsible for all your trouble on Mars."

"Thuth," said Archie. "We can't dithcuthth that until the expenth money ith gone."

By the time Archie ran out of expense money, the three men were in bad shape. Ted Cox was hanging on the bar by his elbows; Sam was sitting on the robot's platform with his head in his hands and Jinnegan was chasing his white wig which was floating back and forth across the bar. Archie announced, "I've run out of futheth and money."

"Good," said Sam.

"Get out," mumbled Jinnegan.

Archie reached out and gently deposited the young spaceman on his platform beside Sam. He rolled over to an opening in the floor against the wall and dropped through. Sam lost the effects of the many Saturn Swizzles he had inhaled when his stomach seemed to blow out of the top of his skull. He was screaming when the robot rolled onto the streets where the archaic automobiles had been driven.

Sam had ridden in the late 1960's models but never had he traveled at this rate of speed. To make matters worse, Ted woke up and began mumbling, "Going in to Mars for a landing. Going in to Mars for a landing."

To add to Sam's trouble, he didn't know what was holding him on Archie's platform. This thought scared him and he put both arms about Ted's waist. "Let me go," shouted the space pilot, "you hang on for yourself."

A violent squeeze on Sam's shoulder told him Archie was holding him in place with his powerful fingers that had been covered with sponge so they wouldn't injure any person he had to grab. This didn't reassure Sam much and he didn't relax until the robot entered the junk yard in which Sam lived. Archie asked, "Which one ith yours?"

"Third from the left," shouted Sam. Then, he remembered. "Great Sufferin' Space Cramps! I forgot my dog food!"

"I got it," said the robot, as he rolled to a stop. Sam opened the carton and tossed the contents to four small black dogs that were barking furiously at them. As each dog ran away carrying his portion of food, Archie unscrewed the plastic plate that was his back and laid one end of it in Sam's doorway and then rolled up this improvised ramp and entered the abandoned space vessel that was Sam's home.

Ted Cox, who had relaxed when he'd discovered that Archie was holding him on his platform, was muttering. "Ninety-two times. I took off for Mars ninety-two times."

Sam grabbed the blond man by the shoulder. "Wake up!" he said, "wake up!" He turned to the robot. "You know this is all my fault, don't you?"

Archie pressed a stud at his waist. In a droning voice which didn't lisp, he recited. "Samuel Hardy Baker was the youngest member of the 1938 expedition to the North Pole. Until recently, he was employed to outfit expeditions to the cold, outer

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planets. He was discharged from the service because of failure to attend to his duties. Said failure due to his presence in the waiting-room of the Allocator of Metals."

Archie's eyes glowed rosily. "Thatth a record. I never got to play one before. I never wath a thpy before."

Ted, who had come awake while the record was playing, said, "Are you Sam Baker? Why I studied about you in History V."

Sam nodded his head. "You'll read about me again if I ever get ahold of enough metal to get a message through to Mars." A sad look crossed his face. "I'm the man who's to blame for that mess."

"Mars!" said Ted Cox. "Mercury Figs! Ninety-two times I've come into that planet with the gravs off and all set for a landing. Ninety-two times I've blanked out and woke up in the space port here on earth. Nobody can land on Mars."

"The Starting Over," muttered Sam.

"What!"

"Listen here, young fellow," said Sam, "you let me tell this my way."

"Yeth," said Archie, "Let him tell it hith way."

"Forty years ago," said Sam, "when I was an Eagle Scout I was chosen to accompany an expedition to the North Pole. This was quite an honor for there were millions of Boy Scouts at that time. My family was proud of me and I guess the proudest of all was my brother Al."

Al said, "What do you want for a present?"

"Get me a ham radio outfit, will you? Then, maybe we can talk to each other."

"Sam! You don't know a thing about radio!"

"If you can learn; I can learn."

Sam grinned as he remembered the disgusted look on his brother's face. Then, swinging his glance from the robot to Tex Cox, he continued talking.

"The upshot of the whole thing was that when I left for the cold country I had a ham outfit and a set of explicit directions on how to set it up. I lost the directions overboard the second day we were at sea."

"The first few weeks we were in the cold country I was so busy that I didn't have time to think of my radio set but finally the long night set in and I didn't have much to do. I set it up as best I could and it wouldn't work. One of our radio men offered to fix it right for me, but I was too stubborn to take his help. You can imagine what a thrill I got the night I received the first signals over the thing."

"The thrill turned to disappointment when I decoded the message and it said, 'This is Mars calling. This is Mars calling.' I thought one of our radio men had picked me up and was having some fun with me."

"Well, the calls went on and on so I tapped out, 'This is Voodoo the Venusian answering.' Right away, I got an answer. 'This is Toon-Loo of the planet you call Mars.' Well, that sounded just like my brother Al who was crazy about some movie cartoon at the time. You see, Looney Tunes-

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Toon-Loo."

"I talked some to this party every day and he talked to me . . . in Morse, you understand. He stuck to his claim of being a Martian and I stuck to mine of being a Venusian. We got along fine until one day he sent me word that he was going to do some work on his sending equipment and would I keep sending so he wouldn't get too lonesome while he worked on his gadget. Here's where all our trouble began. I had a copy of a science-fiction magazine and I picked out a story by Ray Bradbury and tapped it out to him. Yes it's the same Bradbury who is published by Other Worlds. I did this because I figured whoever received the message might get interested in science-fiction and I wanted to start a fan club when I got back to the states."

"After I finished tapping the story I hung around my receiver for a long time but nothing came through so I decided to go to bed. Sometime later my ham set started chattering and woke me up. I decided to ignore it but it wouldn't stop. Finally I acknowledged the call; it was Toon-Loo."

"Of course, he couldn't say enough about Bradbury's story. He'd been so interested in it that he hadn't done one bit of work on his radio set. We had a long exchange and I finally gave him permission to enter the story in the Annual Liars' Contest, and hoped Bradbury would never find out about it."

"The story won the contest. I still didn't believe Toon-Loo was a Martian and when he told me that my statue was to be admitted to the Hall of the Liars, I sent him a perfect description of a cocker spaniel. I didn't hear from Toon-Loo for a long time after that. When he did contact me, he assured me that my statue was on the highest pedestal in the Hall of the Liars. He spent a great many hours telling me how sorry he was that our peoples could never meet. I told him we were already working on space travel. My receiver got red hot from the answer he sent and I didn't catch most of it. The radio set was silent for a month."

"One night it started going again. I answered the call and it was Toon-Loo. He was very happy. I asked him why. He told me that the Martians had perfected a space-time warp. I didn't know what that was and I couldn't understand the math he sent me. When I let him know I didn't get it he tried to explain."

"To make a long story short, anything that approaches Mars is steered to a canal that is called the Starting Over. From there it is projected back to wherever it started from. It's all my fault."

"I don't understand," said Tex Cox.

Sam groaned. "If I had believed the guy was really a Martian I wouldn't have sent him a description of a cocker spaniel and he wouldn't have told the authorities and they wouldn't have built the Starting Over."

"I thill don't underthand," said Archie.

Sam thought of whistling for one of his dogs and letting him demon-

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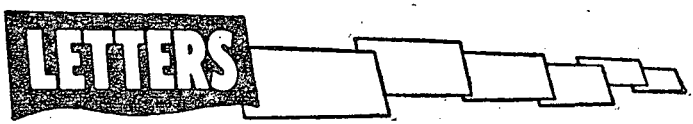
strate but then he decided to give the robot one more chance. Patiently, he said, "The Martians are trees."

THE END



Pat Lake

Since you helped us out at the Cinvention by donating a large number of originals and by giving one of the speeches, we thought we'd press our luck and ask one more favor of you. We have an announcement to make to the fans, and we'd appreciate it if you could publish it for us.

The Cinvention Memory Book is now completed and is selling for $1.00. We're sure none of the fans will want to miss it, whether they were able to attend the convention or not. It's mimeographed and photo-offset, and contains the convention speeches, photographs, and articles by many of the pros and fans who attended the Cinvention. If you were at the convention you'll want a copy as a souvenir, and if you didn't get to this convention, the book will let you know what you missed and make you determined to get to the NORWESCON

Thanks Rap, for your help, and by the way—have you sent for *your* copy of the Memory Book yet?

1616 Walnut St.
Cincinnati, Ohio

Yes, Pat, we have our copy of the Cinvention Memory Book and we agree with you that it's a souvenir worth having. It will always remind us of the grand time we had in Cincy during the 7th World Science Fiction Convention.

Michael DeAngelis

OTHER WORLDS, as of the fifth issue, seems to fill a long-empty niche in the prozine field. I like the well-blended mixture of AMAZING STORIES' format in a diminutive but easily-read little mag; the catholicity of material; and the quality of the interior art-work (to say nothing of Malcolm Smith's well-executed covers). I predict (and earnestly hope) that OTHER WORLDS will remain a bright and permanent star in the science-fantasy constellation.

Issue #5 is better (though I didn't think it possible) than the four preceding issues. The Bradbury yarn was Bradbury; van Vogt is still van Vogt. Any more would be superfluous and rhetorical. The Temple short-short was amusing, though it presented no deep philosophical problems—but then, who wants philosophical problems? The Ackerman piece wasn't too bad, but he's no writing genius.

Colossus III will be hard put to equal Colossus and Colossus II. How good can Byrne get???

The only thing lacking in your mag is monthly publication, which would be gold-plating on the gilded lily.

302 E. 38th St.
New York 16, N. Y.

By now you have undoubtedly read Colossus III, and I think you'll agree that it more than equals the first two stories in the series. As for monthly publication—we can't promise you that just yet, but beginning with this issue OW will be on the stands every six weeks.

Bill Venable

Bill Who? is not my real name. It is just an alias I use when I don't want my real identity known. As a matter of fact, I didn't know you knew that I used Bill Who? as a pseudonym. You must have a telaug ray trained on me from your editorial offices.

Ah now, Mr. Palmer, if you keep putting out such a high-standard mag as OW is getting to be you will drive me wild. I simply cannot criticize a thing about OW, and a fan *must* run a mag into the ground someway in his letter—it's an integral part of his psychological makeup. How else can he get the sadistic pleasure of knowing that several editors are, at any given moment, tearing out their hair?

Seriously, though, I want to say that I thought the editorial in the latest issue hit the spot. What a swat you take at the

(Continued on page 105)

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VENUS TROUBLE

By JOHN WILEY

Elmer Smith ran a Venus steam turbine plant without using fuel. Stanwoody Cripe ran into trouble finding out how he did it!

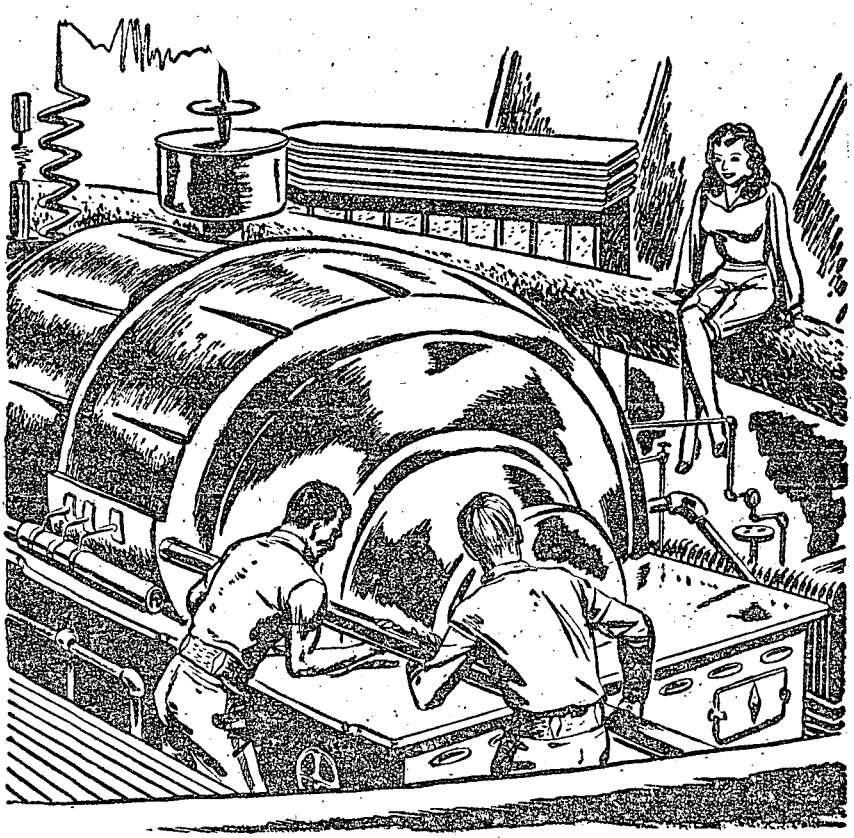

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Illustration by Bill Terry

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The title can mean trouble with or on Venus; or, when Venus is a woman, woman trouble. Stanwoody Cripe found it meant all three, actually and potentially.

This is the sequel to "Venus Trouble Shooter" (November 1949 OTHER WORLDS) that positively guarantees to solve the riddle of how Elmer Smith ran a power plant for a whole year without fuel.

— JOHN WILEY

I WATCHED the gray topography of the terrain below speed by. The continent of Blinkum, which is a thousand miles wide at its widest point and takes up eleven thousand of the twenty-four thousand miles of circumference of Venus, was perhaps the most monotonous country in the universe.

The monotony was interrupted here and there by man-made buildings, all large and massively constructed to withstand the eternal winds that sweep from the dark side of Venus to the sunward side. On the roof of each building a number could be seen.

I was creeping past such a building down below. Its number was sixty-three, the one we were looking for. Plant sixty-three was the one that O. T. (operating technician) Elmer Smith had run for a full year with no consumption of fuel. It was my job, at the moment, to find out how he had done it—if I could.

Each of the plants like sixty-three consumed about five million dollars' worth of fuel oil an Earth-year. Elmer Smith had saved five million dollars in operating costs. As an incentive, the O.T. was offered a bonus of fifty percent of what he could save on operating costs over the average of the two previous years. His bonus was two and a half million. That was just twelve times the salary of the Old Man, Gregory Janes, President of Interplanetary Enterprises Incorporated whose capital assets were worth about three billion dollars more than the national debt of the U. S.

It was unheard of that a common O.T. should make twelve times as much as G. J. It made the Old Man very angry, so he asked me to find out how Elmer had done it—but Elmer was non-committal.

I'm Stanwood Cripe, chief trouble shooter for I.E.I., commonly referred to as "ayiy." I'd been given this assignment by G.J., and had taken off from Earth to Venus on a regular passenger ship. Only a couple of minor things happened that got me off the track.

One of those minor things was to get married to a gal named Mary Alice. She was probably chewing her fingernails back in New Chicago, Winkum, waiting for me to hurry up and figure out how Elmer had run a power plant without fuel, so we could take our honeymoon.

The pilot had cut off the jet motors. I twisted my head to one side and watched the air. Briefly, there was a stationary distortion in the air, in the form of a refracting wave that spread out from the short wingtip at a forty-five degree angle. While it

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existed we were going at sonic speed. Then, we dropped to subsonic and the wave was lost.

I twisted around in my seat and lifted my head so that I could watch the coptor blades rise from their well. I never tired of watching the marvelous mechanism of a plane. The four large blades rose out of the well and telescoped out to their full length, rising on a telescoping shaft. I felt the braking effect of their resistance to the air at our five or six-hundred mile an hour velocity which was rapidly dropping.

There was a coughing sound as the motor that ran the blades started. The four blades started up, and changed into a disk of blurring motion. The blades took over the guidance of the ship, and it rocked, inert, under the parachute effect of the coptor screw.

The pilot turned back, dropping the plane slowly as we went along, so that when we were again over plant sixty-three we were only a couple of thousand feet above it. Under jet flight we had been at an altitude of about eight miles, in the layer between the stratosphere winds from the sunward side to the dark side, and the ground winds from the dark side to the sunward side.

The plane hung at an angle of thirty degrees, its coptor blades biting into the wind. The pilot was heading for the landing spot to the leeward of the plant. It would be a ticklish job. It takes an expert to fly on Venus, where the very best of weather would be considered grounding weather back on Earth. My pilot, Jim Forsythe, was one of the best. Even at that, I would probably have had a softer landing if I had jumped the last twenty feet before our landing.

The new O.T. came out to meet me. He was Bill Southern, a smart young fellow, who had graduated from M.I.T. with honors, and was slated for a top job after his first few years of service in outpost jobs. His deal was special in that it took the two years' costs previous to the last year, and had a special provision to prevent him from getting a cool two million and a half as Elmer Smith had done.

He grinned in welcome as I stepped out of the plane. I grinned back, though I was still trying to get my vertebrae unscrambled from the jarring thump of the landing.

The pilot was still in the plane, collapsing the coptor mechanism into its well, and otherwise fixing things for an indefinite stay. I looked at the plane, a beautiful needlenose craft, with wings that stuck out from the sides about three feet. Jim Forsythe, the pilot, waved an okay to me from the transparent forepart of the ship.

I followed Bill Southern through the door into the huge power plant. The comforting odor of steamheated air combined with that of lubricating oil welcomed me. The noise of the wind that whistled outside was replaced by the subdued, businesslike hum of turbines, the muted-roar of furnace flames behind the expressionless wall of furnace fronts that

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formed the opposite wall of the plant.

As I paused to soak-in this atmosphere, I felt a sense of defeat and impotence. How could I find out anything here?

Sure, I knew all about such plants —I knew the whole setup—I could have operated the plant myself—I could have built it. I knew all about the vast oil reserves that filled the worked mine shafts, and provided the source of fuel for plant sixty-three and all the other plants strung over Blinkum. I knew the theory of power networks too. It's quite a complicated thing when you have interconnected generating plants along a six or seven thousand mile round trip power circuit.

"How's everything, Bill?" I asked, just as if I knew the guy instead of having had to learn all about him from the files.

"Okay, Mr. Cri — Cripe," Bill Southern said. Most people acted a trifle embarrassed about my name at first—probably not sure whether it sounded insulting or not. Grandpa had a real sense of humor when he invented that name.

"Find any signs of anything that might point to tampering?" I asked.

"Plenty," Bill said. "I'll show you after we have a bite to eat. These machines don't make sense so far, but they definitely point to the fact that Elmer Smith did a lot of changing around here—as well as changing things back."

"Let's have some coffee and a sandwich," I suggested. "You can tell me what you've found while you fix a snack."

We went over to the small office and living quarters that were standard equipment for these power plants. Jim Forsythe joined us by the time Bill had the coffee started.

The coffee, as everyone knows, was a standard mixture of synthetics. The coffee industry was one of the first to fall under the wave of biochemical achievements that took place from 1950 to 1960 during the decade of progress. That was the period when biochemical synthesis reached its maturity. Product after product was analyzed and duplicated in the chemical plants. Flavor and effect became a real science.

"Bill," I said, when he had things going, "what have you found out?"

"Well," he said, "first I went the rounds with a torque wrench. That was my best bet. I tightened one of the big nuts on the turbine cases to about five hundred pounds of torque when I first put the case on. When it was warm after a few hours of running, I tightened it again to five hundred. That held it. A month later eight hundred wouldn't budge it. A year later it took over a thousand to start it off. That way I could tell which nuts had been loosened."

"Yeah," I said. "What did you find?"

"I found that one of the turbine cases had been taken off about a year ago," Bill Southern said.

"Anything else?" I asked.

"I checked the inventory of parts," Bill said. "I found that some pipe was missing. I've looked for it, and I can't find where it was used, or

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what became of it."

"Some pipe missing?" I asked incredulously. "Huh! Probably replacement. The old pieces will be in the scrap pile."

"They aren't, though," Bill said. "I've checked all the piping, too. There's one six-foot section of three-quarter-inch pipe replaced in the water side of one of the condenser units—the one for steam turbine number four."

"What does the log say about the pipe, if anything?"

"Nothing. Not even anything about that replacement—and nothing about the other pipe missing from the warehouse supply."

"Maybe the missing pipe will give us some clues to what Elmer Smith did," I said, "but I have a sneaking hunch it will take more than clues to give us an idea of what took place in here about a year ago." I looked out through the glass wall of the room at the vast organization of machines that was the powerplant. It hummed quietly in its production of power which was sufficient to run a city. "I'd liked to have been here about a year ago and seen what Elmer did. The furnaces were cold, and their fuel oil shut off. The steam turbines were running at full speed, generating full power—but not from steam, though God knows what it could have been! What else could it have been? Whatever it was, it would take tons of it. Where would it have come from? Elmer couldn't have brought a hundred pounds of anything here without the company knowing about it."

I sipped my coffee, and looked out over the plant, speculating.

"I've thought of a possible explanation for the missing pipe, Mr. Cripe," Bill Southern said. "If Smith used it to make new circuits in the piping of the plant, to have left it around would have given us the obvious pieces of the jigsaw puzzle to put back where they fit."

"That's probably right," I admitted, my respect for Jim mounting. "If we had all of those missing pieces of pipe we could find out where they fit, rehook them, and study the circuits. He had to destroy them, but how could he? Maybe they're hidden some place. Wonder if there are any abandoned mine shafts near the plant, to which he could have hauled the pipes on the truck?"

"I haven't been away from the plant to explore yet," Bill said.

"You can do some exploring," I said to Jim Forsythe, my pilot. "Do it on foot, and keep within sight of the building until you've explored every square foot."

I turned back to Bill Southern.

"Is that old piece of six-foot length of three-quarter-inch pipe in the junk pile?" I asked.

"It was," Bill said. "I found it and laid it to one side. It was split open almost its full length."

"Let's see it," I said, gulping down the last of my coffee.

I followed Bill into the far end of the plant. We went through a small door which hung in large sliding doors, and found ourselves in a con-

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tinuation of the building, which was walled off from the plant. The replacements were kept here, and also the debris, such as old pipes, old insulation, worn out meters, and so on.

Bill went straight to a piece of pipe propped against a post. He handed it to me without speaking. I examined it closely. It was three-quarter-inch galvanized pipe, threaded at both ends. The length of the pipe was mostly split open, and the split followed a rough longitudinal line that conformed to the crystallization pattern of the metal. The split edges were pushed out considerably so that the gap was half an inch in some places.

"What's the normal pressure on this line?" I asked.

"Forty pounds," Bill said. "It's fed by a duplex steam pump, so the pressure couldn't exceed ninety pounds."

"That's what I thought," I said. "If the line valve was shut off with the duplex pump going, the pump would come to a stop as soon as line pressure equaled steam pressure. The steam pressure is regulated by a reducer valve from the main steam line that prevents the pressure from going over ninety pounds. Right?"

"Right," Bill agreed.

"Then we have a clue right here," I said. "This pipe couldn't have been broken open by pressure in the line. There's only one other thing that could have done this."

"What's that?" Bill asked, mystified. "You don't mean freezing! That would be absolutely impossible. The coldest it ever gets here is forty-five degrees—but we can check with the temperature charts for the past year and find out for sure."

There were two temperature meters; one to measure outside temperature, and the other to measure the temperature inside the power plant. We found the daily charts filed away in the storage files where they were supposed to be. We took them out and began to look them over.

I skipped through those for outside temperature. They seemed to be normal, as the ink line stayed at an even fifty-seven degrees Fahrenheit. The date of each entry was stamped in the blank center on the date line.

"They seem okay," I said to Bill. "I don't see any sign of freezing weather. How're the ones for the plant?"

He was frowning at the pile of paper disks he had on the table in front of him.

"I don't like the looks of them," he said. "The temperature line on each is okay, but look at this!" He pointed to the date stamped on one.

I looked where he was pointing. There didn't seem to be anything wrong. Then, I saw what he meant. On the area of the paper where the date was stamped there was a lighter color to the paper—and on the printed date line over which the date was to be stamped there was apparently a poor job done in the printing.

"Looks to me," Bill said slowly, "like an old chart, with the original date taken off with bleach, and the new date stamped over. The stamp ink is easily bleached, but the print ink of the line is different stuff—it's

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carbon base rather than vegetable, and would remain."

"I believe you're right," I said excitedly. "That means he took a year's batch of charts and changed the dates. Wonder if the outside charts are that way." I glanced at some of them—the ones for outside temperature were also faked!

"Now why would he do that?" Bill Southern asked, puzzled.

"Only one reason could stand up," I said. "He wanted to conceal the temperatures that actually existed here during the year. He probably changed the charts every day as he should, but destroyed the actual charts, and covered up the shortage by using charts of some previous year."

We searched through the stored files and found out that Smith had substituted charts from six years back. The boxes supposedly holding those charts were full of unused ones.

"Well," I said, wiping the dust off my coat sleeves with my hands, "we have two strong clues pointing to freezing temperatures existing here last year—faked temperatures charts, and that burst cooling water pipe. You're sure that other piping wasn't used to replace burst pipes?"

"Quite sure," Bill said. "Most of it was six-inch and fourteen-inch steam pipe anyway."

"That would be hard to hide," I suggested. Bill didn't say anything. My thoughts turned to those bolts that had been loosened during the year. "Show me the places where units have been worked on," I said.

"It's the number four turbine and condenser unit," Bill said.

I followed him to the turbo-electric generator which rested on the upper floor. The huge condenser was underneath. I knew the construction.

The turbine takes high pressure steam (four-hundred pounds pressure) which shoots through striking the turbine blades attached to the rotating shaft. The steam is deflected back against stationary blades which again deflect it so that it strikes another row of speeding blades. It does this several times, then shoots out into the vacuum chamber. A lot of the steam's heat and pressure is already transferred into the motion of the turbine, which in turn runs the generator. The steam condenses rapidly against the walls of the thousands of copper tubes in the huge condenser tank, and gives up the last of its heat of vaporization through the copper tubing walls to the blanket of water inside the copper tubes. This heats up the cooling water, so it's pumped rapidly through the condenser to the cooling vats outside the building, where it's sprayed in fountains into storage pools, the air rapidly cooling the heated water.

Meanwhile, the condensed steam in the form of water is pumped out of the bottom of the condenser and forced back into the boilers where the furnace flames convert it into high pressure steam once more.

That's the theory of the turbine steam plant in operation—simple to understand. The reason gasoline turbines weren't used was that in a plant this size the cracking plant necessary to convert crude oil into

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the gasoline necessary to run the plant would have been about three times as big as the steam generating plant that used the crude oil. Gasoline turbines are superior to steam turbines only in the smaller sizes, around a hundred horsepower.

Bill Southern showed me where covers had been taken off of unit four. It was obvious that a great deal of work had been done on the unit. How much, I began to realize two hours later. Huge steam pipes showed signs of having been taken off. Flange bolts proved to have been monkeyed with very recently. Sheet-metal screws, which held insulation jackets in place, were still bright from scraping with screwdrivers.

Since none of the other turbine units had been tampered with, it gradually became obvious that whatever Elmer Smith had done to the plant to make it run without fuel, had all been done to unit four. Since at least two of the turbo-electric units were necessary to generate the load on plant sixty-three, that meant that either the changes had been such that the generator itself could put out more than its rated capacity, or in some way unit four had been changed *to provide the energy necessary to run the other generators!*

That was a startling thought—that unit four could in some way be made to generate energy of some sort that could run two other turbo-electric units, or maybe itself and one other that didn't have to be changed in any way.

Did unit four itself generate any electricity during that year, or did it produce all the power generated during that year? I put the question to Bill Southern. We brought out the books that gave meter readings for all the units.

Generator four had produced no electricity during the entire year, that is, until the last three days of Elmer Smith's year of duty. He had cut it into operation three days before the replacement was due to arrive, and left it running.

That meant that the generator of unit four had not been connected to the power circuit. If unit four had done any running, it had been with an idly spinning generator. Therefore, the changes made in four had been made to convert it to do something in relation to units generating the actual power, without the generator itself, generating electric power.

In some way, the turbine and the condenser of unit four had been made to take the place of the steam boilers in the generation of power.

I was beginning to reconstruct the superficial aspects of what had gone on. Elmer Smith had arrived at plant sixty-three with his plan perfected down to the last detail. Unit four had not been in operation when he arrived. As soon as the O.T. Elmer was succeeding had packed his things and left, Elmer had gone to work on unit four. When he finished changing it to fit his plan, he cut in the extra idle unit with unit four during a slack load period, then shut off the fuel and let the boilers cool down—or maybe kept them hot for a few days—until he was sure his theory

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worked in practice.

It had worked, so from then until three days before the new O.T. was to arrive, unit four had replaced the bank of steam boilers. The generator of unit four had played the part of a flywheel only, giving the blades of the turbine the momentum needed to keep them from fluttering and changing speed easily.

I began to feel a sense of inadequacy. It was beginning to look as if it would take more than my knowledge to figure it all out, even if we found the missing pipes. I couldn't even be sure about that burst three-quarter-inch pipe. It was from unit four. If unit four was creating the power necessary to run two turbo-electric units out of nothing, that burst pipe may have been carrying four-hundred pounds pressure rather than ninety.

Still, the next thing on the agenda was to find those missing pipes. They had to be somewhere. I let Bill Southern make his routine checks on plant operation, and went outside to see how Jim Forsythe was doing in his search for them.

I saw him almost a mile away, wandering aimlessly. I set out to intercept him, my eyes exploring the terrain under my feet.

Thousands of feet overhead hovered a solid appearing cloudy layer of leaden gray. Underfoot, the thick bunchgrass formed a soft carpet for my feet, with bare granite forming patches that the wind kept free from sand or soil that the roots of plants could cling to.

I leaned unconsciously into the wind, which never varied in the slightest. There were no hills big enough to act as barriers to the turbulence. The winds had a clean sweep from the ice continent on the extreme pole of the dark side, across the flat continent of Blinkum, and on into the sunward side where they swept upward to return to the ice continent via the stratosphere.

As I walked, a new thought occurred to me. Although the land was flat, undoubtedly the granite underneath wasn't. The soil had filled in these low spots. That meant that there might be places where Elmer could have buried the pipes and replaced the bunchgrass sod. The excess soil, when spread out to dry, could have been picked up by the wind and distributed, so there would be no telltale pile of dirt left.

I hastened my steps to tell Jim about it. Unless he found the pipe or a hole it could have been dropped into, we would have to cover the ground again with a metal detector to locate it.

When I reached him, he told me he had covered a complete circle of the plant, and hadn't found anything.

Back at the plant I called Mary Alice on the phone. I knew she would be anxiously awaiting word from me.

"Hi, Mrs. Cripe," I said when I heard her voice.

"Are you all right, 'Stan?" she asked, anxiety in her voice.

"No," I said. "The plane crashed and I got killed. I'm calling from the spirit world."

"That joke is just moderately

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funny," Mary Alice came back. I groaned deeply in admiration. She laughed delightedly at my suffering.

"How're things?" I asked. "Find some nice clothes on your shopping tour?"

"I haven't been shopping," she answered. "I've been working."

"Working?" I echoed. "Now you listen here, Mary Alice—"

"Don't you use that tone of voice to me, Stanwoody Cripe," she interrupted. "I'm the bride of the chief troubleshooter for 'ayiy,' and that makes me chief-assistant troubleshooter, so I've been out shooting trouble."

"And I'll bet wherever you cut off a dragon's head two grew in its place," I groaned.

"Maybe," she said with a pert tone of superiority and self-satisfaction. "But where you've been battling the tail of the dragon, I've been having a few talks with its head."

"Meaning Elmer Smith?" I asked, unable to keep the startled admiration out of my voice.

"I thought that would do something to you," Mary Alice said.

"Say!" I said. "That's a good idea. I'm glad I thought of it. Maybe your womanly wiles can work where officials couldn't get to first base. Go to work on him."

"I already have, Stan," she said coyly. "He's — ni-ice."

"I knew I should have brought you along with me," I sputtered. Her tinkling laughter added fuel to my jealousy.

"Have you uncovered anything out there, Stan?" she asked.

"Don't change the subject," I said. "What have you accomplished with Smith?"

"Elmer?" Mary Alice asked. "We've had dinner together, danced, and seen a couple of shows."

"All in one day?" I mocked.

"That's right," she said. "It has been only part of a day. It seems longer" — Her voice was wistful, but changed on her next words—"because I feel as if I'd known Elmer for ages," she added with elaborate soulfulness.

"Hang up," I said. "I'm going to call G.J. and ask for a transfer to the colonial farms where I can keep you under my eye all the time."

"Good!" Mary Alice said. There was a click.

"Hello?" I said. "Hello?" I jiggled the receiver.

"Number, please?" a female voice said.

"I was disco — why you little —" Mary Alice's laughter was catching. I chuckled. "Okay, what have you found out from Smith?"

"All right, I'll tell you," Mary Alice said. "I've found out that you won't find out anything. He says that if he were to let anyone know what he did out there it would destroy civilization on Venus, bankrupt I.E.I., and upset the whole economy of the solar system. That's why he isn't talking. Not only that, he's going to tell I.E.I. to keep their two and a half million dollars and just give him his salary for the year."

"That's white of him," I said sarcastically. "Now all I have to do is tell G.J. that Smith said to forget it.

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He would of course drop the whole investigation immediately and let us take our honeymoon. It wouldn't bother him in the least that there was some way to save ayiy about eighty-five million dollars a year on Blinkum alone, not mention a few billions in other places. All he has to do is just wait for one little upstart to open his trap and start talking."

"I know what you mean," Mary Alice said thoughtfully. "But the fact remains that it belongs to Elmer, and if he wants to keep it to himself he has a right to."

"The heck he does," I said. "It belongs to ayiy. He did it on their time, with their equipment, and is getting paid two and a half million for doing it."

"Oh, no," Mary Alice said. "He perfected it before he went to work for ayiy. He says the very charts you might uncover to present as evidence would prove that there was no experimenting done on ayiy time."

"I guess that's true," I admitted. "We hired his skills, and unless those skills invented something while in our employ, we don't own those skills. Have you gotten anything out of him that might give a clue? For instance, what did he mean when he said it would destroy civilization on Venus?"

"He wouldn't elaborate," Mary Alice said.

I hung up a few minutes later without learning anything more. My wife had promised to keep working on Smith—a little too eagerly, I thought, but after all, I couldn't go around building up jealousy. I had work to finish before I could take Mary Alice on our honeymoon.

I left the office and went across the plant to the warehouse section. Up until now I had been taking obvious things first. Now the time had come to start getting down to the abstruse.

In the warehouse section was all the equipment necessary to make repairs. There were lathes, pipe threaders, welding machines, both gas and electric, pressure testing outfits, as well as the bins of parts, the shelves on which rested replacement valves and factory-packed panel meters and automatic controls. There were workbenches and drawers full of tools. There were wrenches galore. There were the racks that held piping of all sizes and types—enough to outfit a wholesale hardware house.

All this stuff had been brought in by the huge amphibious freighters; tractor-treaded, ocean-going scows of five-thousand tons' displacement. They sailed from ports on Winkum and made a large circle to get away from the swift waters of the channels between the two continents, and crawled up on shore on Blinkum, traveling overland to wherever their cargo was to be unloaded. These amphibs and the huge aircargo planes formed the lifeline between the continents of Winkum, Blinkum and Nod.

I took off my coat and rolled up my sleeves. The six-foot length of three-quarter-inch pipe that had burst was leaning against the post where I had left it. I took it to a bench and examined it some more.

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Maybe pressure could have blown that pipe open. I decided to find out.

I took a twenty-foot length of three-quarter-inch galvanized pipe from stock and cut a six-foot length and threaded it at both ends. I screwed a cap on one end, then screwed the other end onto a reducer on the pressure testing machine.

I started up the pump and smoked a cigarette while I watched the pressure needle climb slowly. At sixteen hundred pounds per square inch the needle suddenly dropped back to zero. The pipe had burst.

The break was similar to that in the other pipe, but only about four inches long, with a gap only an eighth of an inch at the widest part.

That settled that. A pressure burst wouldn't split the pipe along its full length. I had thought as much, but wanted to make sure.

A full length split, then, would have to be due to freezing. Solid ice, building up unrelieved pressure, would slowly split the pipe and spread it out uniformly.

There was refrigerating unit other than the standard kitchen refrigerator and deep-freeze. Neither would accommodate a six-foot length of pipe. The deep-freeze had two compartments with variable temperatures for keeping different things.

There was no need of testing and duplicating the pipe split. It was now obvious that it had been done by freezing, and that was utterly insane.

The whole thing was insane—to run a powerplant without fuel—perpetual motion. It was like so many things that had been accomplished in the history of science — impossible, but they worked. When they were working, science figured out why, and where the mistakes were that had led to the belief that functional invention was impossible.

One thing was certain, though. Number four wasn't run by perpetual motion, which is the creation of power out of nothing. Wherever the energy had come from, it was real energy that had run up wattage on the meters, and therefore had been taken from some source of energy. But what source of energy was there besides the normal supply of fuel oil piped into the plant through a sealed meter? Absolutely none!

By a wild stretch of imagination I could connect the almost proven fact that sufficient cold to freeze a pipe and burst it by taking heat energy from the atmosphere itself would leave the atmosphere cold. But that violated the laws of entropy. To extract heat energy from the atmosphere with devices like the generators in a power plant would consume more power than it produced. If that could be done, electric refrigerators could be built without motors and run without fuel.

I had to face it. There was no source of energy available other than that of fuel oil, the latent heat contained in the atmosphere itself, and in the eternal winds that whistled around the eaves of the building. The force of motion of the winds, although a possible source of energy, would have taken windmills bigger than the power plant itself to produce enough power to run the generators.—

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—It had to be the latent heat of the air.

My thoughts turned to Elmer Smith. I looked about me, at the workbenches, and the gloom that dwindled into darkness away from the "vhf" light tubes. I pictured Elmer here, alone, hastily preparing the pipes and things to change the plant over so it would use the heat of the atmosphere itself as the source of power. Quiet genius. Genius could be so quiet and unobtrusive. It could look out from characterless eyes. You could look at it and never suspect its presence, or its power to manipulate Nature's vast forces.

Elmer Smith, five-foot-seven, twenty-three years old, washed out blond hair, his hundred and forty pounds far from impressive, was such a genius.

His life so far hadn't been much. He had gone to school, graduated from college with the standard B.Sc., put in his application with I.E.I., gotten some minor job somewhere while he waited his turn, gone into I.E.I. p.g. training for a year, then come out here.

It was doubtful if he had ever been off the Earth until he was sent here to Venus by the company. Probably he had never been in love. Most geniuses spent their early years lost in their growing intellect, then bingo — one day they were in love.

A vague uneasiness stirred in my thoughts. Mary Alice was playing with fire if she was leading Elmer Smith on. Having fallen for her myself, I could understand how easy it would be for Elmer to do the same. Maybe he had gone overboard already. The awakening would be a terrific blow to him when he found out she was my wife, and had just been trying to worm his secret out of him for me.

I shrugged off the uneasy feeling. What the heck? Elmer would have to learn to face life by himself.

My thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of Jim Forsythe.

"I've found the pipes," he said.

"Good!" I forgot all about Elmer Smith and Mary Alice. "Where are they?"

"Just outside the plant," Jim said. "You won't be able to do anything with them, though, because they're just a pile of oxides."

I followed him. The pile of stuff looked like slag from a furnace. At first I could see no evidence that it had been piping, but as I picked up chunk after chunk I saw here and there that the stuff had been piping, now completely oxidized and broken up.

"How'd he do that?" I asked. But I knew the answer even as I asked. He did it with red hot steel in a bath of pure oxygen. If Elmer had a generous source of liquid oxygen, all he had to do was lay a pipe on the ground, heat part of the pipe until it was red hot, then spill liquid oxygen generously on the ground around it. The pipe would burn like red hot charcoal, slowly and thoroughly, not changing shape much, then it could be broken up easily.

I stared at the pile glumly. So Elmer had destroyed the one way to

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find out how he had changed things around. If the piping had been intact, to fit the pipes would have been all I had to do. With everything together, I could have figured out how to get unit four going, and get the plant back the way Elmer had it running without fuel.

Then, my thoughts turned to Mary Alice. She was my only hope. If she could make him fall in love with her and blab his secret to her the world would have it, and Elmer would get over his broken heart as soon as he got the nice fat bonus to buy things on which to exercise his talents.

I decided to call her and tell her I had come to a dead end and the rest was up to her. I hurried back into the plant office and called the hotel. The girl at the switchboard rang our room for several minutes—there was no answer.

It gave me an empty feeling to hear the buzz in the receiver as the phone in our hotel room rang time after time—no one answered. I pictured the apartment and heard the shrill ring blasting through the room with no Mary Alice there to hear it.

She had gone out with Elmer Smith, of course. That made my empty feeling all the emptier. It was the first time since the first day I had set eyes on her that I hadn't been able to contact her at any time of day or night that I wished.

While the phone was ringing my thoughts went back to that first meeting. Strange, how something out of an almost forgotten childhood can be the tie that knits two people into the bond of love.

I'd always sort of felt love would never find me—that is—real love. As chief trouble shooter for I.E.I., I met a fair cross-section of the cream of womanhood — secretaries, stewardesses, nurses, woman bosses—women with everything. Some of them I liked, some of them affected me indifferently. None of them had ever created that "something" in me that I could recognize as the thing people in love called love.

I'd gradually come to assume that some day I would pick one of the passing parade that suited me, and marry her. Then, Mary Alice had walked down the aisle toward me—calm, efficient, and sympathetic. She was a trained stewardess on a passenger spaceship, no different than hundreds of other girls — until I learned she was the daughter of my father's favorite poet. Then, somehow, her hair had changed from just a hairdo to a symphony in deep chestnut richness; her face from just a well-formed combination of eyes, nose, mouth, etc., to something full of meaning that I wanted to keep on watching.

I found out what love was in the only way it can really be found out—by experiencing it. Sure, it's possible to reduce it to psychological elements. In my subconscious was a sense of insecurity, that I had never been able to get rid of, created by the death of my father. There had been a subconscious wish to remain a child, with the dreams and realities of youth. There had been the natural urge of the adult male to find a mate

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and raise a family. There had been a feeling of the insecurity of living alone with no one to depend on.

There had been the thousand factors in my subconscious that had suddenly come together to leap out and fasten on the wonderful answer to them all, Mary Alice Demoth. Psychology would explain that these were the factors that made falling in love possible, but psychology couldn't produce the actual miracle, the transformation in my whole being that made me in love.

Now Mary Alice was out with Elmer Smith, perhaps even giving him one of her wonderful smiles. I felt jealousy strike its cruel barbs into me.

—"That number doesn't answer," the hotel switchboard girl interrupted my self-torture.

"Have her call my number as soon as she comes in," I said, and hung up reluctantly.

I went into the plant and joined Bill Southern, the O.T., and Jim Forsythe, my airplane pilot. We killed an hour discussing possible ways Elmer might have changed unit number four.

Bill fixed us a dinner in the kitchen of the living suite connected with the office. After dinner we played cards. The hours passed slowly—Mary Alice didn't call.

It got to be well after midnight. There's no change from night to day and day to night on Venus; but there is a twenty-four hour pattern of life imposed on you by clocks. It's as rigid as if night and day actually existed.

At one A.M. I called the hotel again—no answer. At two, I called once more—still no answer. At two-thirty the card game broke up for the simple reason that I couldn't keep my mind on the cards at all any more.

"A trouble shooter at work," Bill Southern chided. I liked the fellow. He was twenty-six, had dark hair and a square chin. He wouldn't climb far, but he'd be a solid human brick in the I.E.I. structure.

"Yeah," I said. "This problem's got me." I let it go at that. I hadn't told them to whom the phone calls were, so they didn't know the real cause of my distraction. Both Bill and Jim thought I was deep in thoughts of how to run a powerhouse on thin air. Hah!

I stood up and watched while they started a game of two-handed rummy. After a while I wandered into the plant to look around and kill some more time.

My footsteps were again directed almost unconsciously toward the number four turbine. It was no different than the other three. Every part on it could have been replaced by the same part on any of the other turbines.

I watched it, as it hummed with hidden power — five-thousand horsepower. I looked across the red tile floor at the boiler front that concealed the giant water tube boiler which generated the steam to run the turbine.

How could a single five-thousand horse turbine be changed to take the place of two giant boilers? How

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could a five-thousand horse turbine provide ten-thousand horsepower of energy to run two other turbines?

I reviewed in my mind the principle of the turbine. It consumed live steam at two-hundred pounds' pressure. The steam molecules could be considered as individual little balls that hit and rebounded from the moving rotor blades in the turbine. Each little ball, on hitting and rebounding, imparted a blow to the blade. That blow, when added to the billions of similar blows, was the power that ran the turbine and drove the generator that created the electrical flow in the power lines.

Since the energy was imparted by the little ball, it resulted in a reduction of the energy potential of the little ball, and left the ball flying at a reduced speed. In other words, the aggregate of little units of steam lost heat—cooled off. This loss of heat left the last stage of the turbine considerably colder. The units of steam went into the condenser at around two hundred and eight degrees Fahrenheit, ready to condense into water the moment they struck the cool walls of the condenser pipes.

On the other side of the condenser pipes was water—cool water from the spray ponds outside the building. The condensing of the spent steam heated this cool water so that it went back to the spray nozzles as fairly hot water, which was to be cooled off by the atmosphere.

The condensed steam, now hot water, was pumped back into the boilers where the fire changed it back into high pressure steam. Then, the steam returned to the turbine and performed the whole cycle all over again.

By analogy it was possible to transpose the cycle to air instead of steam. It was possible to have liquid air enter the boiler and evaporate into gas, the liquid air taking its heat of vaporization from air forced through the boilers and up the stack. The evaporated air, at two hundred pounds pressure, could then enter the turbine and do the work of driving the generator, the air losing temperature in the process and dropping down to subzero temperatures. It would obviously do that *if there was a vacuum in the condenser chamber to prevent back pressure.* This vacuum could only be produced if the air that entered the condenser was immediately liquefied, just as the spent steam in the steam cycle had been. The air was pumped out as a liquid. If it remained a gas it would take pumps, big pumps, working at high speeds, to maintain a vacuum.

The only way the cooled air could liquefy in the condenser would be if there was liquid air circulating in the cooling water half of the condenser.

The steam-cycle could be replaced by the air-cycle all right, but the cooling water system would have to be replaced by a circulatory cycle of liquid air at temperatures far below the liquefying temperature of air! The circulatory system then, was the problem. If this were solved, then any of the turbo-generator-boiler units could be run on air instead of steam. Any such unit could be thoroughly dried out until there wasn't a

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water molecule in it, by running dry air through it and through a tank of dry calcium chloride, which would remove the moisture. Then fill the boiler with liquid air and let 'er go.

The problem would be to keep the condenser cold enough to condense the spent air from the turbine. Such a cycle, from the steam side, would need no outside aid. Therefore, unit four wasn't needed in the power side; but, since it had served some special function, it must have played a vital role in the cooling system.

I looked over the humming plant, almost able to envision it as it had been under Elmer Smith's guiding genius. Cold boilers were filled with liquid air, the forced draft throwing the warm atmosphere through the furnace and into the maze of tubes that was the boiler. The air would then come out of the stacks intensely cold, condensing moisture so that it would look like smoke.

The stove-hot steam lines would be at air temperature, filled with ordinary air at two hundred pounds' pressure. There would be no freezing problems in the boilers or the steam lines. In the boilers themselves there would be no problem of pipes melting, so the flash vaporization principle could be used, that of letting liquid air into the boilers in just the right amount to replace that drained off by the turbines as they generated power. In the condensing circuit the coating of ice from the atmosphere would act as a natural insulant.

My head was almost splitting from the intense effort to reconstruct what Elmer Smith had done, but I had reached bedrock. In some way, he had replaced the condenser cooling-system with condenser-unit number four turbine circuit. This had eliminated the spray cooling-system outside the plant.

In some way number four turbine had gotten below the evaporating temperature of air. It had provided the liquid air that circulated in the cooling jackets of the other condensers to condense the air into liquid form. Then it could be pumped out to maintain the proper vacuum in the exhaust end of the running turbines. It was pumped out, then back into the boilers to evaporate again.

I'd climbed a mental ladder, so to speak, and arrived at a peak of achievement where I could relax for the moment. I glanced at my watch. It was three-thirty, and Mary Alice hadn't called.

I hurried back into the plant office and called the hotel again. There was no answer from our room. Mary Alice was still out.

Suddenly, I realized that this had gone beyond the point of idle jealousy. Something must be definitely wrong or Mary Alice would have called me. Even if she hadn't gone back to our room she would have called me from some place to let me know she was all right.

It was absurd to think that Elmer Smith would do anything to her. It was much more likely that the Venusians had done something. Maybe the Venusians had kidnapped both her and Elmer!

I cursed desperately. Why hadn't

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I thought of that as a danger. I had recently foiled a well-laid scheme of the Venusians to make spaceflight so costly in lives that the Earth would give up space travel, and then I had blithely gone my way, secure in the conviction that the Venusians would do nothing to retaliate! What a fool I had been. I didn't even know what had become of that Venusian priest I had captured and turned over to the police when we were rescued.*

I ran into the room where Bill and Jim were still playing rummy.

"Get the plane ready for takeoff," I ordered. "We're going back to Winkum immediately."

Jim Forsythe looked at me, astonished, then dropped his cards on the table and went out.

"Sorry, Bill," I said. "Some trouble has come up that demands my presence back in New Chicago. I'll be back later. Keep track of anything that turns up here, and if you want me in a hurry call me at my hotel."

*In Venus Trouble Shooter, (Nov. OTHER WORLDS), a Venusian priest, hypnotically disguised as another of the passengers, had wrecked the passenger spaceship, plunging it to the ice continent of Venus to destroy it and all on board. Stanwoody Cripe had penetrated the scheme and captured the priest. The ship had landed on a shore of the ice continent. The wrecked ship and the ice it was on had broken loose and drifted across the hemisphere of ocean toward the sunward side, and, as it neared the land continent belt, coptors had come out and taken everyone to safety. In the excitement of the rescue and his marriage to the stewardess, Mary Alice, immediately after, Stan had merely turned the priest over to the authorities and forgotten about him.—Ed.

I gave him the number and hurried out. Jim Forsythe had the coptor blades idling when I got to the plane. I turned and waved at Bill, who was standing in the doorway of the plant, climbed into the cockpit, and closed the plastidome cover while Jim gunned the coptor motor.

The ship rose uncertainly under the lift of the huge blades until it almost cleared the plant. The wind suddenly took it and tossed it in violent acceleration.

Jim gunned the motor and dipped the coptor blades deeply into the wind to pull us forward and upward. There was a contest between my stomach and my body to see which could keep inside the plane. My stomach lost.

Then we were falling in a steep downward glide as the coptor mechanism retracted into its compartment and the jets warmed up. The flat monotony of Blinkum was rushing up to meet us.

Blinkum seemed to tilt crazily. At the same time my stomach returned to the fold and cradled around my backbone as the jets shot the ship forward into sonic, then supersonic flight toward Winkum.

It was seven A.M. when I stepped out of the hotel elevator and strode down the carpeted hall to the motionless door to our room. The key had been at the desk. Mary Alice still had not shown up, but there might be some note or clue in our room.—As I unlocked the door, the noise rebounded in the quiet hall. Somewhere down the hall came the faint,

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rhythmic snore of a sleeper. The clang of elevator doors on another floor sounded.

I pushed the door open and entered the room, flicking on the light switch just inside. Seconds later I stood still in the center of the room. There was no note, no sign of violence—no nothing. I hadn't really expected anything. Mary Alice had obviously gone out with Elmer Smith and there hadn't been any reason for her to leave a note. Whatever had taken place had happened after she left.

Suddenly I thought of Russ Tryon. If Mary Alice had needed help in a hurry, Russ would be the one she would call. He was the pilot of the ship we had come to Venus on, and had been best man at our wedding.

Three quick steps took me to the phone. I waited impatiently for the night operator to wake up, then asked for Russ' room number. The phone rang five times.

"Hello," his sleepy voice answered.

"Russ?" I said—"Stan. Do you know where Mary Alice is? She isn't in the room, and there's no note."

"What!" His voice was suddenly wide awake. "Hell! She was going to have dinner with Elmer Smith. That's all I know. She had some idea about worming his secret out of him." He was silent for several seconds. "What time is it, Stan?"

"A little after seven," I said.

"Then something's happened," he said. "Where are you?—Your room? —Stay there till I get there. I'll be right up."

He must have dressed in the hall and the elevator as he came up, because he arrived in less than two minutes. I was glad to see someone else with a look of grave concern. It gave me company in my misery.

"What do you think could have happened?" he asked.

"I don't know," I said. "I keep thinking of that Venusian priest."

"Have you called Elmer Smith's room?" Stan asked.

I mentally kicked myself and went to the phone. I hadn't even thought of it, but as I asked the operator for his room number I realized I probably had thought of it and dismissed it. If Mary Alice was missing, he would be missing too.

The phone in his room kept ringing but remained unanswered. I knew I had been right. I dropped the phone back into place with a feeling of satisfaction which I wondered at. Why hadn't I thought to call him before? My mind had refused to accept the possibility of her being in his room at this time of the morning.

"He didn't answer," I said. Russ noted the relief in my voice, a dry smile on his face. He deliberately destroyed that relief with his remark.

"Too bad," he said. "If he'd been there we could learn more of where she went and what she did. We'd have something to go on—and we haven't a thing now."

"That's right," I said, misery settling over me once more. "Not a single thing. If it were someone I didn't care so much for I could think of something. Everything I think of is long range, like calling on the po-

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lice to trace their movements. In a couple of weeks maybe we could find where they were last seen, but I can't think of two weeks without knowing where Mary Alice is and whether she's dead or alive. I've got to know now."

"Take it easy," Russ said. "Sit down and let me take over."

Russ went to the phone. Soon he was talking to the police. His quiet, assured tone, his questions about the Venusian priest, gave me a feeling that he would do much better than I at tracing down possibilities. He hung up and turned to me.

"The Venusian priest is still in jail," he said. "He's being held incommunicado until instructions come from Earth on what to do with him. They're going to put out a general alarm and call in an emergency force to search for Mary Alice and Elmer Smith. They'll give us a report in about fifteen minutes. Want a drink?" I shook my head. "Then I'll order coffee sent up," he said. "I need some even if you don't."

I couldn't bear the thought of idly drinking coffee while Mary Alice might be dead or dying. However, when the waiter set the tray down on the table and I smelled the coffee's rich aroma, I realized it was what I needed after a fifteen hundred mile trip and all the mental anguish I'd been through.

The phone rang. I spilled my coffee trying to set down my cup to answer it. Russ grabbed up the receiver . . .

"It's the police with their report. Hello. Yes . . . I see . . . I'll do tha . . . thanks."

I waited impatiently for him t hang up and tell me the other side o the conversation

Russ hung up. "They say Mar Alice had dinner in the hotel dinin room with Elmer Smith from si thirty to eight o'clock. Afterward sh waited in the lobby for about te minutes while he went upstairs. The he came down and they left the hote together. They got in a taxi whicl took them across town to a nightclub In the taxi Elmer kept arguing tha he didn't drink and didn't like night clubs—"

"Were the police following them?' I asked incredulously.

"No," Russ said dryly. "They're just doing in minutes what you thought would take weeks—mainly because you are so important They've been getting all this by questioning. The hotel part came from the hotel dicks, waiters, and taxi drivers who were gotten out of bed at this ungodly hour by the solid fist of the law on their bedroom doors. There're roughly three thousand men working on this—all of them awakened by a mass emergency alarm system which was originally installed in the event that there should be a native uprising. To get back to what they've accomplished—from that nightclub, at five minutes to nine, they got in another taxi and went a few blocks to a second nightspot. They stayed there until ten ten. The police don't know what they said or how they acted there, yet, but they

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have the manager of the place getting the names and addresses of the girls that wait on tables there. They'll have the girl that waited on Mary Alice and Elmer Smith as soon as possible. Something said somewhere along the line and overheard by some employee waiting on them might give a clue to where they are now."

"God!" I said in awe. "Where did they go from there?"

"That's all they've found out in fifteen minutes," Russ said. "Give them another ten minutes to locate her, will you?"

I was too dazed to laugh at the joke. Sometimes organization scared me. A human being by himself is a nice creature with a pleasant personality, but the planets were not bridged by human beings themselves. They were bridged by something greater than a mere human being—a lot of human beings knit into something superhuman in its abilities. The basis of it was teamwork, with each person doing something a single person could do easily without strain. I shook my head, marveling.

"They'll report again in a few minutes," Russ said. "As soon as they find one place they've been, they wake up all the taxi drivers working near that place and show them pictures of the two."

I could hear the muted symphony of police sirens wailing over the city—had heard it unconsciously for several minutes—and realized it was hundreds of police cars hurtling down streets to this place and that, searching, uncovering one clue after another.

Yet, what would they accomplish? Would the trail they were following end with two corpses? Would it end at the edge of the Venusian jungle? Would the final report be "Presumed to be captives in the hands of the natives?

The phone s h r i l l e d stridently again. Russ picked it up, grunted a hello, and listened, then handed it to me without changing his expression. I was never to forget that.

"Hello?" I said.

"Listen, darling," a voice said. "Why didn't you stay put? Elmer and I are at the plant. He's going to show me how he ran it without fuel. Come on back. I can't talk any more now or he'll suspect something. He fell in love with me, and he's showing me because I pretended to think he was a liar and would throw him out."

While the words beat into my frozen mind I was trying to realize that it was Mary Alice and that she was all right. What she had done came to me in a flash. She'd taken Elmer to drinking places until he was half drunk, then put the pressure on him until he made up his mind to show her he wasn't a liar. Mary Alice, thinking me still at Blinkum, had hired a plane to take them to Blinkum where Elmer could show me what he had done.

"Say something!" Mary Alice's voice ordered.

"Thank God!" I breathed, and the phone slipped from my fingers. I heard Russ saying we would be there as quick as we could get there, but

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his voice sounded *incredibly* far away.

My face was still smarting as the coptor blades pulled the plane into the air toward the gray ceiling of clouds. The smarting was due partly to the rough slapping Russ had administered to snap me out of it, and partly to the humiliation of having fainted.

It was the same plane I had used before, but the pilot was Al Forsythe, Jim's brother. During the hour and a half it took to make the fifteen hundred miles I slowly recovered my poise and perspective.

Of course Mary Alice hadn't had a chance to phone me and tell me they were coming. I should have thought of that. It was all so simple and clear, now. A little thought would have told me the Venusians didn't do things impulsively. If they did anything about that priest in the New Chicago jail, it would be after they consulted their gods and got orders. That priest himself—if I knew anything about the Venusians, would be killed for getting caught, instead of the revenge being directed at anyone responsible for his capture.

I was so happy I was punchdrunk, but in the back of my mind a vague worry still persisted.

It was obvious Elmer Smith was in love with Mary Alice. Otherwise he wouldn't be doing what he was doing whether drunk or sober—and he had probably never been drunk before in his life!

How would he feel when he woke up to what had happened? I was an adult, disillusioned male, and I had fainted with relief at the knowledge that Mary Alice was safe! How would Elmer react when he found out—as he must—that she had played him for a sucker to make him expose his secret?

I wouldn't worry too much about it if Elmer was an ordinary man. An ordinary man might be sore about it, or even decide to hate women the rest of his life. He might even go nuts and try to kill the woman. Elmer Smith was a genius—probably a great genius.

He had gone against his better judgment which told him that to reveal his secret would be catastrophic for Venus and perhaps for all civilization. He had risked that merely to prove to Mary Alice that he wasn't a liar!

I told myself I was ridiculous to jump out of one worry that was groundless into another that was even more groundless. I tried to get the worry out of my mind as the plane ate up the miles faster than I could count them, but it wouldn't be banished.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw a frown on Russ' face. I wondered if he was worrying about the same thing, but I kept my thoughts to myself.

My thoughts shifted back to the police organization that had been suddenly brought to quick action. It was organization, teamwork, that accomplished superhuman miracles. The individual in such an organization was an ordinary human, doing

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a routine chore. He was a cog that could be replaced by another with a half hour's instruction.

Elmer Smith was no such cog. With his mind and his two hands he had calmly switched a whole power plant to a different way of running that consumed no fuel.

What else could he do with that intellect? I wondered, and the thought deeply disturbed me. It might be a horrible thing if that mind were to become warped by some blow.

"Damn Mary Alice," I groaned. "Poor, naive, loveable, little fool. She didn't—couldn't—realize what she was doing or might be doing. She was treading where the angels of I.E.I., including me, fear to tread—and it was too late to stop her."

Plant sixty-three came into sight below us. Al Forsythe cut the jets. I was too tired and too full of worry to raise up and watch the air wake that would appear as we dropped to sonic speed. I just hung onto my seat and waited until we could get out of the plane and the sooner the better.

Mary Alice and Elmer had probably passed Jim Forsythe and me on our return to New Chicago. I looked down and saw their plane on the small landing area.

Our wheels hit the ground. I shoved back the plastidome and bolted out with Russ Tryon a split second behind me.

We hurried to the door of the plant. No one had appeared to greet us. Bill Southern was probably occupied with Elmer and Mary Alice.

I twisted the doorknob and rushed into the plant. Russ caught the door before it swung closed, and followed a step behind me. I stopped so abruptly to survey the huge expanse of the plant that Russ stepped on my heels.

No one was in sight. Suddenly the door from the workshop and storeroom opened. A moving pipe appeared and as it came into view the figure of Bill Southern was seen carrying it.

He saw me and waved, but said nothing. I watched him as he went to the head of the grill steps leading down to the space where the condenser to unit four was situated. He and the section of flanged piping he was carrying went down those steps out of sight.

I groaned. There could be only one meaning to that—Elmer was changing things back to the way he had had them.

"God!" I groaned audibly. I should have been delighted. Wasn't it what I wanted? We would learn what Elmer Smith had done, and then I could take my six months vacation and Mary Alice and I could go somewhere on our honeymoon. Still all I could do was groan "God!" Something was wrong with me. Maybe I was deficient in Vitamin E. But when I glanced briefly at Russ Tryon's face I saw an expression there that reflected my own feelings.

I walked slowly over to the head of the stair well and looked down into the condenser pit of number four. I saw Mary Alice sitting on the cushioned insulation of a big pipe.

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Bill Southern and a stranger with mussed, hemp-colored hair were grunting over the section of pipe Bill had carried down, and were trying to get it into place.

The stranger, I knew, was Elmer Smith. A great compassion for him welled up in me as I took in his clean shoulders, his mussed hair, and his capable movements.

Bill had not told Elmer or Mary Alice of my arrival. He had probably decided to let me make my own moves. He was just playing along the way the cards were handed out. I made a mental note to put in for a reward bonus for him.

Something made Mary Alice look up. Her eyes met mine. Our glance held for an eternal instant, then she shook her head and looked down again. She was telling me to play it like I didn't know her.

Well, the damage was done. Regardless of what this did to Elmer, I might as well play along so I.E.I. would get the benefits of his invention.

I leaned my elbows on the guard rail around the pit and watched. Russ glanced at me, then did the same.

I watched Elmer Smith work. I watched him turn often to glance at Mary Alice and give her a quick, boyish grin. I got several good glimpses of his youthful face. He never looked upward. His eyes either remained on what he was doing, or jumped over to take in Mary Alice.

The pipe squeezed into position. Elmer and Bill bolted the flanges tight, as they were the copper-seal type, and needed no gasket. The torque wrenches cinched the bolts to even tension.

Finally Elmer stepped back, and wiped his hair out of his eyes with a grease-stained sleeve.

"There," he said. "It's all done. Now all we have to do is get in running." His voice came up to my ears clearly—I liked it—It was unselfconscious, honest.

He glanced up suddenly. His eyes widened as they met mine, but there was no alarm on his face. He recognized me, I assumed, from my picture, but he had evidently made up his mind to go right through with his promise, and my presence didn't alter that.

He lowered his head, said something to Bill Southern, then helped Mary Alice to her feet with that possessive manner of a man in love.

I watched her face closely. It was obvious that she didn't realize what she had done. I understood. Elmer was the cause of our not having the honeymoon to which newlyweds are entitled. She was beautiful enough so that I had no delusions about my being the first man who had fallen in love with her. She had waited until the right guy came along. All the other guys had gotten over being in love with her without cracking up. To her way of thinking, Elmer would get over it too. So it wasn't cruel, it was sane and normal. It was like a woman burning dynamite sticks in a cookstove because she thought they were stove size prestologs.

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I half veiled my eyes to hide their misery as they followed Mary Alice and Elmer up the steel grill steps. He was helping her, a carefree grin on his face as her high heels caught in the grillwork. Bill Southern was staying down, either to complete last minute preparations to get unit four going, or because he guessed what was going on and didn't want to be around. His actions indicated that he had guessed Mary Alice to be my wife.

"Hello," Elmer grinned. "You're Mr. Cripe. I want you to meet Mary Alice." He turned to her proudly.

"We've met," I said gruffly, quickly changing the subject. "You've changed things back to the way they were when you were running the plant?"

He frowned, evidently debating whether my bruskness was insulting to Mary Alice or not. His spirits didn't drop to the level of recognizing an insult, real or imagined.

"All fixed," he said, smirking. "Number four is fixed now. It's the turbulator in the final cooling stage—the key to the whole thing."

"Turbulator?" I asked.

"Yes," he said simply. "You see, in the steam turbine the steam has to leave the turbine rotor before vaporization begins, because the droplets that would condense against the blades would set up destructive vibrations. Also the droplets would wear out the blades in no time if they didn't break up from the vibration. That's why the actual condensation of steam has to take place in the condenser instead of the last ounce of heat energy being used to drive the rotor.

"The same holds true for the air cycle," he continued. "The air has to leave the operating turbines before condensation of the gas starts. It goes into the condenser of the turbine and partially condenses against the cooling walls because on the other side is liquid air as a coolerant. The vapor then goes to number four turbine at near zero absolute pressure. The rotor of number four spins idly, at a subharmonic speed regulated by a variable resistor shorted across its generator to absorb the power generated by the extraction of the last bit of heat from the liquefying air. There's also a bypass circuit shooting liquid air into the steam to further cool the liquid air.

"The liquid air goes through number four turbine — the turbulator — into number four condenser, where it's pumped out and introduced into the cooling jacket of number four. From there it goes through the condenser cooling jacket of the units in service, and then to the boiler injector."

I nodded grimly, not saying anything, not trusting myself to say anything. Mary Alice was beginning to sense my thoughts and mood. Her head was turned away and she had a funny expression on her face.

The smooth skin of Elmer Smith's forehead creased into parallel, fine lines between his wide set eyes.

"I've let you know how I did it now," he said worriedly, "but I'm afraid it isn't going to do you any

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good. With just one plant using it there isn't much danger of upsetting the weather pattern of Venus. I studied the effects on the atmosphere very carefully and made lots of measurements, and concluded that with even three or four plants operating like this it would change the wind pattern and shift the cold-hot axis of Venus enough to cause a catastrophe. Your men can repeat my study and verify it."

"Yes," I said. "I'll order that done, and not put any other plants under operation on it until we verify your conclusions and study what can be done about it."

"Good," Elmer said with relief. "And about my two and a half million bonus, will I get it all right?" He gave Mary Alice a knowing look.

She read that look all right. Her lips trembled and she looked away, avoiding Elmer's eyes.

I took a deep breath. It was now or—there could not be a never. Mary Alice was my wife.

"Thanks for giving up your secret, Elmer," I said. "My wife was sure you would when you realized — "

"Your wife?" Elmer interrupted me. His eyes switched back and forth between my frozen face and Mary Alice's slowly reddening one.

His features were a vivid drama on a stage that filled all consciousness. He read and denied and accepted and denied what he knew was true. He flashed back in memory over every second of his hours with Mary Alice and realized she had never once led him to believe by word that she was available to his affections. He plucked out the isolated smiles and intimately appearing encouragements that she had undoubtedly used, and realized they could be meant two ways. He added them up, in this moment of clarity, and realized that she had deliberately, though not maliciously, trapped him, goaded him, and played on his innermost, most sacred temple of self-esteem.

"Your wife," he said, his voice seeming to come from some other place than his mouth and throat. "Of course." His face was relaxing into an almost vacuous expression. "Very nice woman. Sorry I didn't realize."

"I thought you knew," Mary Alice said, attempting to set things right. "My rings. . ."

"I didn't notice them," Elmer said. "I'll go now. Bill knows how to get things running — I've been telling him. Glad to have met you, Mr. Cripe."

He stepped around me and half ran to the outside door. Mary Alice started to go after him, but my grip on her arm prevented it.

She looked into my eyes, her own troubled and worried. I shook my head slowly.

"Let him alone," I said.

A coptor motor coughed and settled into a roar outside the building. The roar deepened, then receded rapidly to silence as the plane, in which Elmer had brought Mary Alice, was caught by the wind and scooped away with him in it — alone.

Mary Alice's lips trembled. She

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moved hesitatingly against me, laid her head on my chest and cried softly.

I stood there, stiff and unyielding, my thoughts following Elmer in the plane as it rushed upward and away into the alien atmosphere of Venus.

Then, slowly, I put my arms around her shoulders, and comforted her. She let herself go, finally realizing to the full extent what she had done.

You can't hurt a man that bad and expect nothing to happen. What would happen to Elmer Smith? I hoped we'd never know.

THE END

LETTERS

usual stodgy accepted methods of long-term stfmag editors in their editorials. And it's true. It's gotten so I don't even glance at 'em anymore. I already know what the editor is going to say. But I can in all truth say that I enjoy reading your editorials all the way through. (Note: The opinions herein are not solicited by Rap and are entirely my own. Any similarity between my opinions and your own is certainly not coincidental.)

ENCHANTED VILLAGE: Wotta ending. True van Vogt at his best. In fact, a beautiful story.

ATOMIC ERROR: Yukyukyuk! This was real cute, and much enjoyed in this quarter.

WISHER TAKES ALL: New twist. In fact, you seem to have a lot of novel-twist stories. More power to ya.

COLOSSUS II: A few words about this in connection with a letter from a reader in this ish might not be out of place. "Obvious socialistic-communistic propaganda." Somebody gotta put this boy in his place. (1) So readers of stf are particularly vulnerable to propaganda, are they? That just goes to show how *little* he knows of said readers. There is nobody more hard-headed, free-thinking and open-minded than stf fans. They do not subscribe to regimentation in any form *at all*. I won't say that readers of stf don't have their ideas and dreams of super-civilizations, but they are not communistic as we know of it now. They are anarchistic, if anything. (2) I know, and you know, that our present civilization in America and elsewhere is rather corrupt and is run by political machines. I could give you a few examples right here in Pittsburgh except that I cannot prove them and *ergo* might be sued for libel. But I can see no reason for not bettering the situation if possible—Communism, of course, is not the answer.

(Continued from page 77)

THE JUSTICE OF MARTIN BRAND: Very, very, very good. I liked this one a lot. It is not too new in thought, but so well done that it tops every other story in the field.

WAY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE AIR: All right, all together now gang:

Bradbury writes just like Caldwell
Bradbury writes just like Caldwell
Bradbury writes just like Caldwell . . .

Seriously speaking, 'twas a very good stor One of Bradbury's best.

All in all, it was a very good ish. Including the News of the Month and all other features. You might have noticed that Redd Boggs said that he didn't think it was worth the 35¢ you charge, but for my money, he is dead wrong. And I'll prove it with my money—by buying each and every ish.

Ads: *If* they pay for covers like that—vunderful! All I can say is that you can insert all the ads you want if you give us more covers like that. I never heard of a Mac girl, but if she is as good as you say . . . well, just so it isn't a Bergey gal.

32 Park Place, R. D. 4
Pittsburgh, Pa.

Yes, Bill, we are aware that your surname is 'Venable' and not 'Who?'. You'd be surprised at the number of readers who wrote in identifying you. You're either famous or infamous since everyone seems to know you. Glad you liked that issue, and we're going to try to improve with each succeeding one. As for never having heard of the Mac girl—hang your head in shame! She's that glamorous, gorgeous gal who used to decorate the covers of AS & FA.

James V. Taurasi

I've been reading and watching the progress of OW since its first issue, and you've come a long way since then. The

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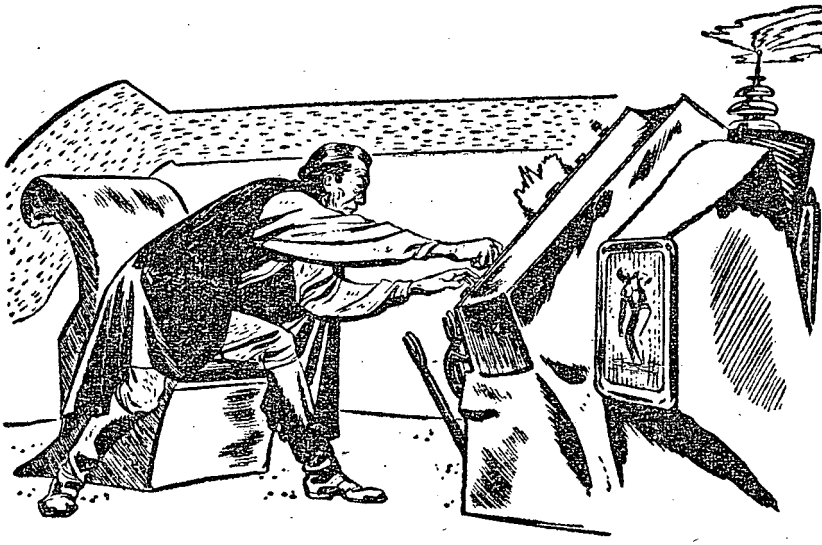

A MAN NAMED MARS

By A. R. STEBER

For 5,000 years Mars had been running the show, but now mankind threatend to carry war to his own doorstep. This last war had to be a good one, or there'd be another not to his liking!

"GET AWAY from that phone, Johnny. I—I'm expecting a phone call."

"*Expecting* one, Susy!" Johnny jeered. "Good gosh, if he was going to call you he'd have done so before now. This's Thursday night."

"He's probably been busy, and stop calling me Susy. My name's Sue. And how do you know it's a he. As a matter of fact it's—well," Sue glared defiantly, "it's a girl!"

"Yaah," fourteen year old Johnny snorted. "A girl of the opposite sex. You can't fool me. You just fool yourself. He ain't going to call. None of them do the second time. And even if he was going to, that's no reason why I can't use the phone."

He reached for the phone. It rang

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Illustration by Bill Terry

The enormous form was moving—one of its arms lifted, and swung toward a plane, to smash it. Down from above swept a swarm of tiny hornets—

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just as he touched it. Startled, he jerked back.

"That's him," Sue said, pushing Johnny aside and picking up the receiver. "Hello-o," she sang. Then, "Oh. Yes. He's right here."

"Nyeh, nyeh," Johnny jeered, taking the phone out of Sue's listless hand.

Turning her head to hide the tears of disappointment she hurried upstairs to her room. There she threw herself down on the bed.

"What's *wrong* with me?" she asked the gaily papered walls. "I take vitamins, and my complexion stays flat. I use stuff guaranteed to produce lustre, and my hair remains a dead yellow—like tobacco stain in Uncle Cedric's white whiskers. I put on a bra guaranteed to create sex appeal, and no one notices."

She turned away from the unanswering wall and looked up at the blue ceiling.

"I'm twenty-one," she said protestingly. "I'm getting *old*."

She stuck out her lip in a pout. It was a very cute pout and did something to her. She knew it did. She had seen what it did in the mirror. But the trouble was that she never found anything to pout about when she was out with a date. It would take a while to relax enough to be herself, and every minute with a date was filled with the fear—almost the certainty—that he wouldn't want to see her again, get acquainted enough to know about that cute pout.

Sighing in resignation she got off the bed and slumped in the futilely named love seat with a book. A shorthand textbook. Tomorrow she would go out jobhunting again. Somehow she never kept a job worth keeping, and always on the way out there was a girl with red hair coming in.

Her mother had said more than once: "I don't know what it is. I guess I must have been scared by a sack of white flour while I was carrying her."

"Sorry, Mr. Chapman," the handsome young man said respectfully. "I can't stay tonight. Why don't you get Fred to do that rush work? I'm sure he doesn't have anything else to do."

"Uh," Mr. Chapman grunted. "Guess you're right, Carter. Oh Fred!"

"Yes, sir." The sallow-complexioned young man looked up from the work piled on his desk.

"I want you to come back after supper. Come over here while I tell you what I want done with this rush work."

Fred rose tiredly. His chest was a tight forty-two, but slumping over his work continually made him look flat-chested and round-shouldered. His hair had a habit of lifting from his scalp and approximating the contours of a bramble thicket, and was about the color of unvarnished plywood.

He wouldn't have had much trouble getting a date, girls being less critical than men. But he didn't know that. His own judgment always informed him at the critical moment that the girl would say no, so he considerately didn't give her the chance to say it.

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He had a fear amounting almost to a phobia against the word no. Consequently he didn't use it now, even though he had been looking forward all day to a pleasant evening with his coin collection.

Instead he went to Mr. Chapman's desk and nodded his head in slow and continuous acquiescence while his night's work was explained to him.

"Report!" Mars said crisply.

His eyes were smouldering pools of black fire, his features portraying the dominant will that lay within. His closely cropped black hair stood straight up like blades of black grass, or, more aptly, the back bristles of an angered panther.

"Failure," the man who stood before him, half bowed, replied.

"Failure?" Mars said incredulously. In his surprise he stood up, rising to his full two and three-sixteenth inches of height.

"Failure, oh God of War," the man said, falling back a pace and bowing even lower, peeking up from under his brows at the dark expression growing on Mars' face. "My vehicle has become unmanageable."

"How did that come about?" Mars asked.

"It was of too superstitious a nature," the man replied. "When I used influence, it became aware of my action. I became hopeful that it would develop into an obedient vehicle which I could direct in full consciousness. I encouraged its exploration of the contacts I had set up within its cortical complex. But then, just when things were developing to the point where I could reveal myself completely, its imagination began to conjure up misconceptions derived from books it had been avidly reading. It joined an organization of students of mystery, and determined to devote its life to the guessing of the numbers and designs on cards without looking at them. It relegated me to the passive role of stooge in guessing games."

"Then you must discard that vehicle and select another," Mars said. "And this time remember that your influence must be most subtle. The best vehicles are those who don't believe in outside influences. Their minds are by nature introverted and possessive. They instinctively *possess* every thought that enters their minds without questioning its source. Scout around. Touch various Earthmen lightly and listen to the conversations of those with whom they come in contact. In that way you can pick someone with atheistic, materialistic leanings. That kind are the best vehicles. With them you can even be foolishly bold in your direction and the closest they will come to suspecting your presence is to worry slightly about becoming a schizo. You are excused."

"I will do as you command, oh Mars," the man said, backing from the room.

Mars slowly sank back into his chair, tapping his fingers absently on its ornately carved golden arm. Finally he reached out to what seemed an ordinary telephone dial imbedded in his desk and twirled it several times.

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In another part of the vast structure of the building a melodious chime sang out. A man asleep in a form-fitting cushion opened his eyes, blinked several times, then rose and left the room. Shortly he entered the room where Mars sat waiting.

"Report!" Mars said.

"I've received a setback, oh Mars," the man said. "My vehicle, or rather my former vehicle, since I am now selecting another, was discharged and is now under scrutiny of the Congressional committee."

"Well what's wrong with that?" Mars asked. "Doesn't that further our plans?"

"In a way yes, and in another way no," the man replied. "I had built this vehicle up to the point where he was about to make a perfectly wonderful blunder that would cause the world to become convinced the United States had unwittingly revealed secret plans for conquest. It would have made the allies of America suspicious of her motives."

"Hmmm," Mars said thoughtfully. "Just how did this upset come about?"

"My vehicle's name was on a list made public by an obnoxious Earthman from Wisconsin. I've been wondering about him, but of course his actions are merely his own. Still, more than once it has seemed that certain Earthmen were vehicles of Moonmen hostile to our interests, oh Mars. Could this man from Wisconsin be such a vehicle?"

"Nonsense!" Mars said angrily. "He's just an unguided opportunist. What else could he be?" His face lit up with an idea. "Look," he said. "Why don't you try to take him over and use him as your vehicle? You will of course have to start in by helping him in what he's doing. That will cut into our work a little, but may be worth it. If he's creating enough of a splash he might become Presidential timber. Then we could—in fact we would have to take him over. We can't afford to have a President of the United States who isn't our vehicle.

"You know our overall strategy. Now that the civilization of Earth has flowered into bloom, it would only be a matter of time before they discovered the principle of flight against gravity and landed on the Moon. We can't have them here. They would inevitably discover us in our cities concealed on the floors of the larger craters. Since they are thirty to forty times as tall as we are we would stand no chance against them physically. Our superior civilization would be literally crushed under their heels. We would become freaks in cages in their sideshows and museums. So we must force them into a final war that will destroy their scientific culture and prevent them from attaining space travel. Now go."

"I will do as you have commanded, oh Mars," the man said, bowing low and backing from the room.

Sue sat huddled into as small a space as possible on the hard bench in the employment office. She was reading a paper-bound book whose cover had been so lurid she had torn it off. From her concentration the

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contents were living up to the title, RED SIN ON THE BEACH.

The outer doors suddenly burst open. The portly, multi-chinned woman who entered paused, looking over the interior in much the manner an eagle would survey a field of mice from on high. Sue looked up from her book, shuddered at what she saw, and returned to her reading.

The portly dynamo of purpose strode down the length of the narrow waiting room in the manner of a navy tug plowing along a canal. She spoke briefly to the harassed-looking man behind the varnished rail, was escorted into the private office of the employment agency manager.

The two unemployed maids looked at each other doubtfully. The three good-looking unemployed stenographers sighed tiredly and went back to their gum chewing. They paid no attention to Sue. They took it for granted that she would still be there when they had gotten jobs.

The buzzer at the switchboard behind the varnished rail buzzed angrily. The harassed-looking man lifted the phone and listened.

"Miss Jones!" he called nasally.

Sue looked up at the sound of her name and saw him jerk his head in the direction of the private office. She looked wonderingly at the three good-looking unemployed stenographers who had stopped chewing their gum in astonishment. This was something that they didn't believe could have happened.

She laid her book on the bench after dog-earing her place and went timidly toward the hostilely blank frosted glass front of the inner office door.

When she opened it she saw Mr. Harris behind his desk. The portly female was squeezed between the arms of a hard chair. Sue closed the door and stood with her back to it, holding her breath while the female looked her over with cold appraisal.

"I think she will do," she said in the manner of a mortician deciding on a vase for the mortuary. "That is, if she types."

"Mrs. Green is here to get a stenographer for her husband's office," Mr. Harris explained. "When she described what she wanted I knew you would fit the bill exactly, Miss Jones."

"I see what you mean," Sue said half humorously. "All right. I'll take the job. When do I start."

"At once, my deah," Mrs. Green purred. "My husband, ah, discharged the secretary he had this morning. You may come with me and I will take you to Mr. Green's office."

Sue followed Mrs. Green like a small painter tied to the aft of a ship, scooping up her book and ignoring the amused glances of the three good-looking, still unemployed fellow craftswomen.

Fifteen minutes later she was watching the hopeful light in Mr. Green's eyes die down to smouldering embers of resentment.

"I think she will prove very satisfactory, deah husband," Mrs. Green was saying. "She comes highly recommended for yuah work."

"All right, dear," Mr. Green snarled. "Your desk is in the outer office, Miss Jones. I'll call you when

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I'm ready for you."

Sue backed out and sat down at the only desk in the outer office. She sighed, knowing that Mr. Green would get rid of her as quickly as he could. Almost immediately she was immersed in her novel again, ignoring the male sounds of irate protest from the other side of the door, the domineering tones of the female voice. It was the too trite pattern of a man with an unattractive wife wanting a beautiful secretary, and the wife, fearing for her security, demanding one as sexless as possible.

"Report!" Mars said crisply.

"Failure," the man said. "My vehicle was liquidated. I barely got free in time. As it was I still felt a little of death when it came to the vehicle." He shuddered at the memory.

"But why?" Mars asked. "Your vehicle was one of the most promising generals in their army? He was in charge of one of the smaller eastern European governments. He was successfully insulting the United States and England. Under your inspiration he was a kingpin in our plans to incite the world to a universally destructive war."

"I don't know," the man replied. "Perhaps some of our agents in the central committee who direct the vehicles presiding there can give you the answer, oh Mars."

"Maybe they can," Mars said. "Hold yourself in readiness for further duty. Indulge in pleasures so as to reorientate yourself."

He turned away from the agent. When the man had left the room Mars called for another of his agents to awaken from his deep sleep. When the man arrived in the room Mars turned to him.

"Report!" he said curtly.

"There is a growing feeling," the man said, "that it would be suicide to carry on to the point of actual warfare. Even my own vehicle is inclining toward that belief, in spite of my insistent voice. Some Marxian theoretician has discovered a new and catching phrase that entices their imagination."

"And what is this new phrase?" Mars asked coldly.

"Margin of safety," the agent said. "It's taken from the books on strength of materials and study of stresses. A bridge, for example, must be able to withstand a load of twenty or thirty percent greater than the maximum load it will ever carry, so that even under the worst conditions it won't collapse. Now that concept is being infiltrated into the dialectical materialism with which we have so nicely indoctrinated the leaders. They have built up a picture of their cold war struggle having as its sole object the crippling of the Western Economy. They have crystallized the danger of actual war into a concept analogous to the breaking of a bridge under a load, and are recalculating all their moves with a margin of safety while holding to their measures-short-of-war."

"So!" Mars said. "Don't they realize that such an objective is suicidal? Time is not on their side, nor ours. In two more years the experi-

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ments at White Sands, New Mexico will have progressed to the point where the first projectile will reach the Moon. It might strike—here! Do you know what that would mean? It would wipe us out."

Mars leaped to his feet and paced back and forth.

"For five thousand years we have had this problem," he said bitterly. "We've consistently driven nation against nation on the Earth, trying to hold back progress. Agrarian and pastoral tribes were no threat. But always the human instinct drove groups together into nations, and nations into study of nature's laws, and inevitably into science. Time after time we've had to raise up warlike leaders who devoted their lives to destruction.

"Finally we saw our mistake. The path we were following would never end. We would forever have to pursue it, since human instinct is for peace and progress. We did an about face. We encouraged progress. In that way we could bring science on Earth to that state where it would be possible for the human race there to wipe itself out completely. It's reached that point. The stockpiles of atom bombs are great enough. All it should take is a continuing pressure until things break into violence. And what happens? The ones we were surest of, the ones most subject to our will and our guidance because they deny the existence of anything influencing their thoughts, suddenly are entranced by a concept we purposely kept out of the philosophy we inspired them to follow. Margin of safety! The instinct for peace. If it weren't for our constant efforts there would never be war on the Earth.

"But is it instinct? Hmm . . . I wonder . . . could *she* be having a hand in this? She has always opposed our program. She's often suggested we migrate to some other asteroid suited to us and leave the races of Earth in peace. If we did that they would eventually find us anyway. Our only course is to keep them planetbound. Our safest course is to have them destroy one another. And now, just as things were at the point . . . could she have been waiting for this time? Certainly she has never interfered in my activities before, contenting herself only with her own childish games."

He seemed suddenly to become aware the agent was still in the room.

"You're dismissed," he said curtly. "Back to your work." And when the man had gone he went, not to his desk, but to a covered machine against the wall, and opened it up. Revealed was a lifesize television screen. He twisted the knobs that turned it on. A gentle humming came from within.

For a long time there was no response. The screen, though lit up, contained nothing but an occasional flash-pattern of static. Mars stood back from the machine inside the scanner area, his eyes flashing impatiently, his jet lawn of hair glistening, his jaw jutting determinedly, his lips compressed.

Abruptly the screen came to life, showing a room that was a fantasy of form and color. A moment later

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someone stepped into view, turning to face Mars.

It was a girl, young, firm breasted, with hair that held flashing gold cascading over white shoulders onto a gown of exquisite designing.

"Aphrodite!" Mars said curtly, glaring.

"Yes, my lord Mars," Aphrodite said, bowing demurely and veiling her dreamy eyes.

"Have you been mixing into my affairs?" he demanded.

"Why—why—do you mean—lately?" Aphrodite asked with innocent simpleness.

"Yes I mean lately!" Mars said. "Have you?"

"In what way?" Aphrodite asked.

"Do you have a hand in this 'margin of safety' business the dialecticians have brought out to beguile the top men in Russia?" Mars asked. "Do you have a hand in this business of smoking out the vehicles of my agents in the United States and putting them out of the way?"

"Oh, my dear, have you been having trouble?" Aphrodite asked sympathetically. "It seems you always have trouble, doesn't it?"

"Not always," Mars said. "I didn't have any trouble in World War I, and World War II went off perfectly. I contrived things so that only two great powers survived. For a while I didn't think Truman was going to use the atom bomb. If he hadn't, then Russia would have gone right on, and it would have forced the United States and Russia into an immediate war. That would have meant the immediate introduction of the atom bomb against a Russia already at war with the United States, and the outcome would have been terrible. There would have been no basis for a devastating world conflict."

'But if things are going so wonderfully, what could be wrong?" Aphrodite asked. She raised her eyes and smiled.

Mars glared at her, then turned away. Even he could not resist the charm of Aphrodite's smile.

"Give me a straight yes or no," he growled. "Have you or have you not been mixing into my affairs?"

"Very well," Aphrodite said. "Yes, I have!"

"I thought so!" Mars said. "Well, you know what happened the last time you did that."

"Let's see," Aphrodite said, "that was so long ago—I think it was when . . . oh yes! It was when you had that huge robot built. That giant that strode through the world and tried to wipe out humanity by stepping on people one at a time. It was childish, really."

"It was not childish," Mars said, glaring. "It would have worked if you hadn't interfered."

"Don't tell me you're planning on using the *Helios Robot* again!" Aphrodite exclaimed. "Why, he's all rusty there in the silt on the bottom of the sea."

"Just on the outside," Mars said. "Inside he's unharmed. But no, I'm not planning on using him again. The world's too big now. Are you going to stop interfering with my work or aren't you?"

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"But I'm not interfering with it," Aphrodite said innocently. "I'm just pursuing my own, teaching people to love, inspiring them to things of beauty."

"Inspiring them to margins of safety!" Mars said. "I'll ask you again. Are you going to keep hands off or not?"

"Since you ask me," Aphrodite said, wriggling her nose at him, "the answer is—no. The idea; deliberately setting out to destroy life on Earth just because an Earthman might some day step on your cute little palace without realizing it isn't just a beautiful outcropping of stone on the Moon landscape."

"All right then," Mars said ominously. "You leave me no other recourse. I must go to Earth myself and take charge."

"No!" Aphrodite gasped, her eyes round with unbelief. "That—that's not fair. It's violating our agreement. We agreed to use only agents. To play our games by proxy."

"I'm going," Mars said. "I'll be there as soon as I decide on my vehicle. And don't be foolish and try to follow me."

"I think you'll have trouble even if I let you alone," Aphrodite said. "The days when a vehicle could announce he was the directly inspired instrument of a god, perform a few miracles to prove it and then rule things, is gone. Today they lock such vehicles up in institutions—even if they perform a few miracles. The human mania for classification has even classified our vehicles as insane types, where they are consciously aware of their capacity and incautious enough to reveal it."

"Don't worry about me!" Mars said. "Just stay here on the Moon and mind your own business!"

He strode angrily to the machine and shut it off.

Mr. Chapman dropped the phone back in its cradle and chewed dourly on his cigar.

"Another rush job to get done tonight," he muttered. "If this keeps up—"

He looked over the sea of heads bent at desks, intent on finishing up their work. The clock on the far wall said ten minutes to five.

There was one empty desk. It had been unoccupied for over a week now. It was getting difficult to find new men to take the place of those who quit. The men knew that, too. That's why they made no bones about inventing "vital" reasons why they couldn't come back after dinner and work until ten or eleven on the occasional rush job.

Only Fred, good old Fred, hadn't the courage to say no. But even he — Two nights in a row. Maybe an offer of an extra few bucks in his pay envelope—a last resort, of course —in case Fred showed positive signs of refusing. . . .

"Fred!" Mr. Chapman called, clamping down on his cigar forcefully as Fred jerked his head up, paling visibly. "Come here!"

He saw Fred's adam's apple jerk up and down—a sure indication that he wouldn't get up nerve enough to say no.

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"Y-yes sir," Fred said when he reached the desk.

"You did very well on that extra work last night, Fred," Mr. Chapman said, frowning inscrutibly.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Chapman," Fred said, his face brightening.

"Which brings up a grave problem," Mr. Chapman went on. "I hate to impose on you, but frankly you're the only one in the office I can really rely on to get this rush order out of the way tonight. You understand I hate to ask you, two nights in a row, but—"

Mr. Chapman took the frayed cigar from his mouth and smiled mirthlessly.

"Well . . . if you really think . . ." Fred struggled helplessly.

"Thank you, Fred," Mr. Chapman seized upon his words. "I knew I could depend on you, my boy. You'll be back at six then."

Mr. Chapman thrust his cigar back in his mouth and picked up some papers, ignoring Fred so obviously that he backed away.

He turned slowly, his lips pouting a little, but not enough for Mr. Chapman to notice if he were to glance up suddenly. He started listlessly back to his desk, thinking of the coins he had been hoping to put in their places in his cases at home.

Suddenly he stiffened. His head came up. He looked upward toward the ceiling as though listening for some faint sound.

Carter, who had been watching the whole tableau with secret amusement, saw this.

"My God!" he thought. "I'm seeing Fred get mad. This I wouldn't miss."

He stared in fascination. Fred was seeming to grow smaller and larger at the same time. His face seemed to change, become fuller, its lines altering subtly.

"My God!" Carter whispered.

And there was just cause for the expletive. A sort of luminescence seemed to be settling around Fred. His dead-appearing hair even seemed to partake of this radiance, taking on a lustre it had never before possessed.

Carter watched as Fred shook himself slightly and continued on to his desk.

"What the—" Carter mumbled his disappointment. "So he doesn't have guts enough to talk back even when he gets mad."

But Fred didn't sit down. Instead, he was picking up this paper and that paper on his desk, looking at it as though he had never seen it before. Finaly he just stood still, closing his eyes, a thoughtful expression on his face.

Then he opened his eyes and started back toward Mr. Chapman's desk.

"Oh-oh," Carter muttered in glee. "Here it comes; the seventh wonder of the world!"

"Mr. Chapman!" Fred said. There was a new quality to his voice, a quality that makes strangers think, "Here's a real bigshot!"

"Yes?" Mr. Chapman said, lifting his eyes. They widened slightly in surprise. He hadn't recognized Fred's voice.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, sir," Fred said, "but I won't be coming

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back this evening. I have other important things that must be done. I'd suggest you have Carter stay in my place."

"Now look here," Mr. Chapman began, biting into his cigar threateningly. He stopped, the changes in Fred beginning to make themselves apparent. He went on in a milder tone. "Why of course, Fred, but I'm surprised that you would consider something else more important than keeping your job — well, skip it — that is, I'm sure maybe Carter will stay, I hope." He sighed deeply.

Fred turned away abruptly. His heart was pounding furiously. Deep inside he was almost fainting in fear. But a part of him that seemed somehow to have separated from his emotions was observing his actions with much more surprise than Carter felt, and much more amazement than Mr. Chapman had displayed.

He was also feeling a thousand and one other subtle changes. And being amazed at them. He sat down at his desk and rapidly cleared it. When it was in order he stood up and looked around. The office seemed to take on a new aspect as he surveyed it. Up until now it had been one pole of his existence, the other being his coin collection.

Now he was seeing it as it really was, a grimy, tawdry room full of cheap desks and uninteresting people immersed in affairs that were less than boring.

His coin collection? Suddenly he hated it. But also he understood why he had loved it. It had been an escape from the dull reality of his existence.

A moment of panic possessed him. The two foundation stones of his life had suddenly turned to sand. He knew he wasn't ever coming back to his desk here. And he knew that he was never again going to find delight in acquiring a piece of metal stamped by the coiners of some stupid lout of the fifteenth century who happened to have been King.

And he hadn't the least idea what else life could hold for him.

He went to the coat rack and scooped his hat off the top shelf, oblivious of the fact that it was still two minutes of five and everyone in the office had stopped breathing while they watched him depart.

The door slammed behind him as he stepped into the hall, the deserted hall that gave no hint of the stampede that would occur in another minute and three quarters, as almost five thousand people began their mad dash homeward. It seemed like some place he had never been before, and in reality he never had, because it had always been crowded with people when he was in it. His footsteps echoed strangely.

He ignored the elevator and took the steps two at a time, reaching the street at just five o'clock. He paused there, undecided what to do, which way to go. He didn't want to go to his room.

He chose the direction that would lead him away from all he knew. He walked rapidly at first, until the street and its stores were strange to

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him, then slowed his steps.

"So many stores," he thought. "So many businesses. So many little people owning them, working in them. Stupid people, grasping at what little security they had the ability to seize. So many stupid little people. It was on wonder anyone with half an ounce of talent could rise from the herd and stand above it."

"*I* should do that," he mused. "But how to get started?"

Without being aware of it he had stopped in front of a bank. He looked up at its massive portal, blinking his eyes. Its doors were still open. It was Friday, and the bank was open till nine.

On impulse he went in. He paused inside, looking out across the acre of marble squares that was the floor, noting the tellers cages, the walnut railings that protected the area where the vice-presidents sat directing the business of the institution.

He walked over to the walnut railing and stood there quietly. And three men at three expensive desks rose as one and started toward him. Each became aware of the other and paused. Then one came ahead while the other two returned to their desks.

"How do you do, sir," the bank official said. "Can I be of service to you?"

Fred regarded him silently, nodded his head once. The bank official opened the gate.

"Won't you step inside, Mr.—ah—"

"Fred Wright," Fred said.

"Mr. Wright," the official said. "My name is Smythe. Right this way, Mr. Wright." And when Fred was seated, "Now, in what way can we be of assistance to you, Mr. Wright."

"I would like a loan," Fred said. "A ninety-day, fifty-thousand-dollar loan."

"Of course, sir," Smythe said ingratiatingly, opening a drawer and bringing out a blank note. "Would you like to open a checking account to keep it in?"

Fred picked up the blank note and examined it. It was the one for a personal loan without security.

"If you need more before the ninety days are up just give me a ring, Mr. Wright," Smythe said ten minutes later, holding open the gate.

Fred, a trifle dazed, left the bank with the checkbook in his breast pocket.

"Why didn't I ever think of doing this before?" he wondered. Then another thought struck him. "What the heck am I going to do with fifty thousand dollars?"

The buzzer at Sue's desk sounded feebly. She frowned at it, putting her book aside, picked up her shorthand notebook and pencil, and went to the door to Mr. Green's office.

When she entered he was sitting on the other side of his desk glaring in her direction.

"Oh-oh," she thought. "This is it—again."

"What kind of stenographer are you?" he demanded. "This isn't what I dictated to you for this letter."

"If you say it isn't," she said re-

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signedly, "I guess it isn't. But it's what I heard you say, and what I wrote down."

"None of your impertinence, young lady," Mr. Green said curtly. "You're incompetent. That's what you are. Incompetent."

"Yes, sir," Sue agreed. "I never said I was anything else. Your wife asked for an incompetent stenographer, that's what the employment agency gave her."

"She asked for a *competent* one," Mr. Green said in tones that would have frozen a thermometer.

"What's the difference, competent, incompetent?" Sue said. "If they're good-looking, you don't care. If they're nice and safe, your wife don't care. Since I'm fired, how about ending this chit chat and giving me my time so I can report to the unemployment office before they close?"

She felt a wave of dizziness and sank into the nearest chair, holding the back of her hand to her forehead.

"What's happening to me?" she thought frantically. "Am I sick or something?" She felt Mr. Green's eyes on her and smiled wanly. "I'm all right," she said. "Don't get the idea this is an act to keep my job. Frankly I'm sick of working for an old goat who hasn't enough gumption to run his own business."

Mr. Green seemed not to hear her words. His eyes were large and round. They held a light that Sue had seen in men's eyes only when they were looking at other girls than she.

"Now wait a minute," she said, getting to her feet. "You're not *that* desperate. You just fire me, get a nice looking girl in my place, and have fun until your wife drops in again."

Mr. Green was slowly rising, his eyes fixed hypnotically on her.

"Miss Jones," he said, his lower jaw trembling from some emotion or other, "you were right. Absolutely right. I remember now that that's what I dictated."

"What are you talking about?" Sue asked. "Oh, that! Well, what difference does it make? One excuse is as good as another."

"But you don't understand." he said. "I want to keep you. In fact, I'm going to double your salary, get you an assistant. You should have a larger salary to move out of that hovel you're undoubtedly living in."

"You *are* desperate!" Sue breathed, backing toward the door as Mr. Green came around the desk, breathing heavily. "But really, I prefer a younger man, or at least a single one. I — I just couldn't break up your home, you know, Mr. Green. . . ."

She bolted from the room. She was picking up her book and purse when he came through the door, a wild light in his eyes.

"Just mail me my check, Mr. Green," she said, half running toward the exit.

"Wait, Miss Jones — Sue!" he was saying as she reached the hall.

"Must have been a nervous breakdown," she decided, her heels tapping nervously toward the elevator bank.

Ten minutes later after fighting off

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the elevator boy and threatening to call a cop if the taxi driver didn't take her to the address she had given instead of a "cute little place out on highway fifty-five," she arrived at the unemployment office.

"So soon?" the harassed-looking man at the switchboard said. He did a double take, his eyes staring at her, his mind departing.

"Well," Sue said hostilely. "Are you going to tell Mr. Harris I'm back or not?"

"Y-y-yes, of course, Su — Miss Jones," he stuttered.

His eyes stayed on her as he called the inner office. They were still on her when he said: "You can go in. . . ."

"What's the matter?" Sue asked half humorously. "Have I got a disease or something?"

"Y-y-yes — I mean no," the harassed man said. He gained a modicum of mental recovery. "Whatever it is, it sends me." His titter gave evidence of being seldom used.

Sue closed the door on the sound, feeling disgusted.

"Well, Sue," Mr. Harris said without looking up, "I'm beginning to wonder what to do with you."

"Me too," Sue said fervently.

He looked up then. His eyes went round. His hand holding a pencil laid it down carefully without orders from his central nervous system.

"Not you too!" Sue said protestingly.

"I have it!" Mr. Harris said excitedly. "I'll get rid of Elmer. You'll work for me on the switchboard starting in the morning! At a substantial raise over what Elmer has been receiving," he added meaningfully.

"Good bye, Mr. Harris!" Sue said, fleeing. She evaded the clutches of the harassed man at the switchboard. In the hall as she hurried to the elevator she muttered, "I guess the vitamins must have worked slow. That's the only explanation."

"First thing," Fred decided as he slid out of bed in response to the alarm clock, "is to get an office."

He stretched sleepily and went to the bathroom. A hasty shower drove away the last remnants of sleep. He rubbed down briskly and stepped before the mirror.

He blinked at what he saw. His face was a glowing picture of internal health. His hair — its plywood color had altered subtly to a living off-platinum.

"I know what kind of haircut I should have!" he said, snapping his fingers. "A crew haircut! Then I wouldn't have to make it stay down."

He hummed idly as he ran the electric shaver over his stubble.

"Guess it must be that fifty thousand I got from the bank," he said to himself. "Golly! Fifty thousand bucks! All mine. For ninety days." His spirits fell, only to bounce back up.

"If I can't make money with that fifty thousand in ninety days," he decided, "then I'm not Fred Wright!"

At the corner in front of the hotel he bought the morning paper, glancing at the headlines.

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NEW PEACE OVERTURES BETWEEN EAST AND WEST, he read.

An emotion of anger filtered into his conscious mind.

"What the — !" he wondered. "Why should I get sore about the East and West making peace overtures. I *want* peace!"

The feeling of anger retreated slowly.

"Yes, of course," Fred said to himself. "I *want* peace."

He puzzled over his feeling during breakfast as he read the front page.

"It must be the fifty thousand," he decided. "War would certainly give me plenty of chances to run that up to a million." He snorted at this thought. "I'm thinking like a Capitalist already!"

But the thought diverted his mind to the immediate problem of how he was going to make his fifty thousand dollars earn money.

"I could start a cafeteria," he mused. "But I don't know anything about the business. I could go into wholesaling, but I'm sick of it, and who wants to spend their lives tied to percentages? Maybe I could start a used car lot. But no, I want something that I can use a nice office for. Maybe I'd better find the office and then decide."

There were plenty of offices in the classified ads. He checked three of them, and tore the section out of the paper after he finished his third cup of coffee.

From the cafeteria he wandered into a barber shop, blinked, then remembered he had planned on getting a crew haircut. There were no customers. He chose the first barber and sat down.

"How about a crew haircut?" the barber said invitingly.

"That's just what I wanted to get!" Fred said. "How did you hit on it? No one's ever suggested it before."

"Oh," the barber shrugged in self belittlement. "I have the touch, the taste. I can look at a man and tell the kind of haircut that will fit his personality."

Fred sat down in the barber chair. The barber began his work.

"What line of work you in?" he started the conversation. "I'll bet it's stocks and bonds. The stock market. I could tell it when you walked in the door. 'There,' I said to myself, 'is a bigshot. A broker.' Am I right?"

"Well," Fred said. "I am planning on opening an office. Stocks and bonds . . . the stock market . . . yes, you're right. I'm in that business. Good business to be in."

"You need a good secretary?" the barber asked. "I know just the girl. She's my brother's sister-in-law's daughter. Here. I'll give you her name and phone number. She isn't working right now — or if she is she'll be out of work by the end of the week."

He abandoned his clipping temporarily, located a pencil and paper and wrote the name and phone number down.

"Here," he said. "You get her. Strictly business, very good stenographer. Smart, too."

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"Thanks," Fred said absently, shoving the paper into his pocket.

"There you are," the barber said a few moments later, pulling off the cloth as though unveiling a statue of Lincoln.

Fred stood up and looked at himself in the wall mirror. He decided that for the first time in his life he had found himself.

"I should have hit on the crew haircut years ago," he thought regretfully. "It was all I needed to make me."

Out on the sidewalk he took out the section torn from the ads and looked at the first address. A taxi took him downtown to the building. The building manager's office was on the fourteenth floor.

"Sorry," the receptionist said. "Mr. Freeburg won't be in today. Drop back tomorrow."

"But this office for rent — " Fred said.

"Oh, that's been rented," she said. "Late yesterday afternoon. It was too late to have the ad taken out of the morning paper. Sorry."

A taxi took him to the second on the list. He felt better about losing out on the first when he saw where it was. It was a modern skyscraper less than half a block from the stock exchange building.

"Mr. Holte will see you in a moment," the girl said, smiling a little sweeter than was necessary. "You don't mind waiting?"

"Not at all," Fred said.

"My name's Doris," she said.

"Mine's Mar — I mean Fred Wright," Fred said. "Ha! Wasn't that funny. Ever have trouble remembering your name all of a sudden?"

"N-no," Doris said, "but my sister did for a long time after she got married. Sometimes I envy her. She has a nice home, and poor little me, I live in a kitchenette apartment all by myself. The Blackstone. Apartment five oh four. I love dancing. Don't you Mr. — Fred. I forgot your last name, Fred."

"Wright," Fred said. "I mean my last name's Wright."

"Right," Doris said laughingly intimately. She plugged in on the switchboard. "Mr. Wright to see you, Mr. Holte," she said. "He'll see you now, Fred. And don't forget, apartment five oh four, the Blackstone."

"I won't," Fred said, and as he went toward the door to Mr. Holte's office he had a feeling that he had asked her for her address and completely forgotten having done so. "Five oh four, the Blackstone."

"Ah, good day, Mr. Wright, good day," Mr. Holte said, rising from his desk and advancing, his face wreathed with smiles.

"Hello," Fred said, submitting his hand to a pumping. "Has that office been rented yet?"

"You don't want one of the offices we have for rent, Mr. Wright," the building manager said. "You are in stocks and bonds? You will want on the fifth floor, of course. We have an office there, already occupied, but we can move the tenant to one of the vacant ones higher up.

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It will be ready for you this afternoon."

"Well, that's fine," Fred said. "But how did you know I was in stocks and bonds?"

"Oh, we building managers, especially in the financial district, have our ways of knowing things," Mr. Holte chuckled knowingly. "You will of course desire a direct ticker tape with the exchange, as well as a direct wire telephone. They will be in when you take over the office this afternoon. Here's your key, Mr. Wright, and if everything isn't satisfactory just let me know. Your furniture can come in immediately. I'll start the other tenant moving at once. The inner office is of course sixteen by twenty, tastefully decorated. Your rug is twelve by sixteen? Or were you planning on wall-to-wall?"

"Twelve by sixteen," Fred said, rising. He glanced at the office number on the key. It was five oh four. That struck a chord of memory. With a shock he recalled that that was the apartment number of the girl outside.

"Thank you for dropping in, Mr. Wright," Mr. Holte said. "It was an honor to meet you. A distinct honor."

"Thank you," Fred said. He closed the door gently on Mr. Holte's dog-like expression of happiness. The office girl was looking up at him expectantly. He grinned. "A coincidence," he smiled. "My office is five oh four."

"All right," she said as though she were accepting a date.

Fred swallowed loudly and left. He had a vague feeling of having asked her to drop down to his office and see him, but couldn't remember having actually asked such a thing.

"It's — unsteadying," he decided. "Around her a man might find himself engaged and the date set before he knew it." He went to the elevator bank and pressed the button. "Furniture," he decided as the doors opened.

"Good morning, Mother," Sue said. She smiled at her father and stuck her tongue out at her brother.

"Why Sue darling!" Mrs. Jones said, pausing in the act of breaking an egg into a saucer. "You look positively radiant this morning. How'd you do it? Something new on the market?"

"I don't know," Sue said frowning. "I think it was the vitamins." She compressed her lips determinedly. "I'm going to stop taking them."

"For gosh sakes why?" Johnny demanded. "You wanted to look beautiful. Even *I* think you look good now, and that's something!"

"Haven't you learned about the perversity of women?" Mr. Jones chuckled. "They want something until they get it, then they wish they didn't have it."

"Yeah, that's women for you," Johnny said. "Ha ha, ha ha!"

"Now you be quiet, Johnny," Mrs. Jones said. "Maybe Sue has a reason for wanting to stop the vitamins. Maybe they don't agree with her."

"It isn't that," Sue said, nibbling daintily at a piece of toast. "Always before I've lost jobs because I was

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too plain. Yesterday I had to run from the office to escape Mr. Green. And when I went anywhere I was mobbed. I even got afraid to go in elevators! The elevator boys tried to make passes."

"Did Mr. Harris believe you when you told him about it?" Johnny asked.

"Believe me?" Sue said. "He didn't even listen. All he did was try to fire Elmer the switchboard man and hire me in his place at twice the salary. I'm going to have to try another employment office."

"I'm going down and punch that —" Mr. Jones began.

"Now you shut up, Paw," Mrs. Jones broke in. "You aren't doing anything of the sort."

"No, father," Sue said. "It's no use your even starting in. You would have to punch — *everybody!*" She spread her arms in a gesture of futility. "I'll just stay home for a few days and not take any vitamins, and it'll wear off."

"Why don't you get a job while you're so full of vitamins?" Johnny asked. "Then maybe by the time they wear off your new boss won't notice it so much."

"I think Johnny has something there," Mr. Jones said. "He would have a chance to fall in love with you while you're — the way you are."

"And love is blind!" Johnny said. "Ha ha, ha ha!"

But Sue saw the sense behind it. "I think I will," she decided. She ate thoughtfully. "Maybe I can tone myself down with some makeup," she said.

An hour later she stood outside a building with the help wanted female ads in her gloved hand. She wore a hat that concealed most of the radiant golden waves of her hair. Her face was plastered with a dull powder that did no more to conceal her new beauty than it had formerly to bring out what wasn't there. Her lipstick that had been designed primarily to look garish gave her a sort of French allure.

She ignored the circle of men that was growing rapidly, and pushed through the revolving doors. She sighed with relief as she saw that the elevator operators were girls.

"But you've got me wrong, my dear," the dignified business man said fifteen minutes later, following her out of the elevator. "Er, how about lunch while we talk this over?"

"Not interested," Sue said.

"But but but but," he protested, following her through the revolving doors.

"Officer, this man is following me!" Sue said to the cop who happened to be standing outside.

"On your way, mister, unless you want to explain this to the judge," the cop growled. He blinked at Sue. "Where are you going, Miss — Miss — I think I should escort you and protect you. The city's full of mashers today."

"Their annual convention?" Sue asked. "No thank you."

She left him involved in the process of thinking of a suitable rejoinder.

At noon she boarded a streetcar and went home. It had been the same everywhere. In every office the

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prospective employer forgot he needed a stenographer and remembered he needed a mistress. Or so it seemed.

"It's no use, Maw," she said dispiritedly when she arrived home. "I'll just have to stay home until it wears off a little. I wonder if I could sue the vitamin company or something?"

"Why don't you go see them?" Mrs. Jones suggested slyly.

"No thanks," Sue said, shuddering. "Men!"

It was nearly two o'clock when the phone rang. Sue had tried to read some more in her book, RED SIN ON THE BEACH, but somehow it was no longer a welcome dreamworld to escape to. She had gone to the mirror an average of once every ten minutes and examined herself critically to see if her new look was fading yet, and each time gone away with the dull realization that vitamins take days to do things. She had given up trying to read, and gone to the kitchen and mixed up some cake batter to bake a cake. And then the phone rang.

"You answer it, Mom," Sue said. "My hands are all doughy, and it's probably for you anyway."

"Yeyus?" Mrs. Jones said into the phone. "Why, she can't come to the phone just now. Oh? Who? My brother's father's son-in-law? Oh, a barber! That must be George. No, he's my brother-in-law's brother-in-law. He never gets our relationship straight. I'm his brother-in—what? Yes, I suppose you could, if you want to take the trouble. Eighteen oh four Washington. . . .That's right. The white house on the corner. . . . I'll tell her."

"Who was it, Mom?" Sue asked.

'He said his name's Mr. Wright," Mrs. Jones said. "He wants you to work for him."

"Oh no!" Sue wailed. "Now they're coming after me! Where'll I hide?"

"George told him about you. Said you were out of work. You usually are, you know, so it was a safe thing for him to say. Mr. Wright said he would like to look you over before he puts an ad in the paper for a girl."

"When he comes don't you dare leave the room," Sue said. "And come to my rescue if he tries anything."

Frowning darkly she poured the batter into cake pans and placed them in the oven.

"How soon did he say he would be out?" she called to her mother who was now upstairs making beds.

"Right out," Mrs. Jones called down. "You'd better get tidied up a little or you won't get the job."

"I'm not worried about *that*," Sue called up dryly. "I wish I had some extra dough. I'd meet him with both hands full."

She turned on the cold water at the kitchen sink to rinse off flour. A moment later the front doorbell rang. Grabbing a towel she hurried to the door. She peeked out. Standing on the porch was a young man. no older than thirty. His shoulders were broad, his hips not too wide. His hat was in his hand. His hair was an off-platinum, cut crew style in a way

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that seemed to fit him. His face, half turned so that he could watch the cat playing at the end of the porch, possessed a *something* that branded him at once a successful business man or maybe a politician, she decided.

Leaving the door she scurried upstairs.

"Mom! Mom" she called softly. "He's here. Come on down. I don't want to be alone with him. No telling what might happen!"

"Oh all right," Mrs. Jones said irritably, "although I do believe you've exaggerated a lot on this new appeal you have for the opposite sex."

"He looks nice, Mom," Sue whispered on the way downstairs. "Maybe — " She stifled the thought quickly.

Mrs. Jones went to the door and opened it.

"Hello," she said.

"Is this where Miss Jones lives?" Sue heard a deeply thrilling male voice from outside.

"Oh, you're Mr. Wright, the man who called," Mrs. Jones said as though the thought had just occurred to her. "Come on in. She's just inside."

Firm footsteps sounded. Sue felt her heart p o u n d i n g deliciously against her ribs. She retreated hastily to the living room.

"Now where'd she go?" Mrs. Jones muttered.

Sue, fixing a reserved, polite smile on her lips, stepped to the doorway, revealing herself.

She saw his eyes go wide, then narrow to mere slits. A black scowl appeared on his face. It faded reluctantly, being replaced by a puzzled look.

Her own smile, against her volition it seemed, became sweet. So sweet she could feel the sugar draining from her blood into it. A tremendous happiness was flooding into her, a delightful laughter that flowed inward, seeking no outlet and seeming to need none.

"Miss Sue Jones?" Mr. Wright said stiffly.

"Yes," Sue's voice purred deliciously.

"Ah, you type?" he asked.

"And take dictation," she answered.

He frowned ponderously.

"My name's Mar—Fred Wright," he said. "Funny, that's the second time today I've gotten mixed up on my name. Did you ever do that Miss Jones?"

"N-no," Sue said.

"Good!" Fred said.

"Won't you come in and sit down, Mr. Wright?" Mrs. Jones said. "Sue's been baking a cake and hasn't had a chance to fix up. She does look rather attractive, I think, when she fixes up."

Fred casually surveyed Sue, frowning. A momentary panic possessed her.

"Have the vitamins faded already?" she wondered with a sinking feeling.

'You look like you'll do," Fred said, then added, "maybe."

He pulled out a blank card and wrote on it, then handed it to her.

"This is the place," he said. "Be

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there at nine in the morning. The salary is thirty-five a week."

"But I've been getting — " Sue began, then relaxed. "All right. I'll be there. Nine o'clock, Mr. Wright."

Fred scowled at her once more, then left. After he had gone Mrs. Jones turned angrily to Sue.

"What's got into you, Sue?" she demanded. "You know you have a right to demand forty-five. You take shorthand."

"I know," Sue said dreamily. "Mom . . . How did it feel when you fell in love with Pop?" She smiled into her mother's eyes. "Did it feel like—like the angels in Heaven were singing with joy, and laughing in delight. Laughing laughing laughing until their laughter echoed back from the stars?"

When her mother made no answer she sighed dreamily.

Fred strode angrily down the steps and out to the cab.

"What did I hire her for?" he asked himself. He thought about this a moment while he climbed into the cab. "Why do I take such a violent dislike to her?" he asked himself. "After all, she's just going to be my stenographer. Kind of good-looking." He thought this over. "very nice looking," he decided. He thought that over. "Maybe that's it," he thought. "I can't go falling for a girl right now. Not for ninety days. I have to double that fifty thousand in that time or back I go to the time clock routine."

He returned to the office and, just to get the feel of the grain market which was active right now, made eight thousand dollars by five o'clock.

But this small success didn't dispel the feeling of angry gloom that possessed him. At two minutes after five he noticed the time and leaped up automatically, then slowed down, grinning at this survival of habit instincts.

"I work for myself now," he thought. "I could even stick around until six o'clock."

He surveyed his office with its luxurious three hundred and forty-nine dollar and ninety-five cent executive desk, its four hundred and eighty dollar rug, and all the extras on which he had splurged. Reluctantly he turned to the door, reaching in his pocket for the keys.

A shadow appeared on the frosted glass. The knob turned. A feminine composite of sensations swept in. He backed up a step, blinked as he recognized who it was.

"I was afraid you might have gone, Fred," she said. "But I should have known you would wait for *me-e.*" It was Doris. She surveyed him hungrily, noticed his hat was on. "Oh!" she shrieked delightedly, "I see you're all ready." She arched up on her arches. "Where are we going? I think the Cheerio is a simply wonderful place for cocktails and dancing, but," she pouted, "their food is simply terrible. Do you like good food, Fre-ed? Sometime when I get to know you better I'll cook you one of *my* meals. But the Vienna is the best place to eat. *Really* it is."

As she chattered, a mixture of feeling struggled in Fred's breast. A de-

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sire to run and jump out the window, a desire to stop the noise with a sledgehammer blow of his fist, and, unaccountably, a feeling of exultant glee that appeared with almost a melodious *poinning* in consciousness.

"Okay," he said abruptly, grinning, while deep inside he wondered frantically *why* he was doing this, "let's go. The Vienna it will be."

"Oh you pick the *nicest* places, Fre-ed!" Doris said delightedly She took his arm with intimate possession, then jerked him to an abrupt stop just before his hand reached the doorknob. "Have you noticed my perfume? It's Eau d'Jour. A whole set with a different one for each day of the week. Right here."

She guided his head down past her cheek to her elevated left shoulder He sniffed obediently. She chuckled deliciously in his ear.

"You can't fool me" she said delightedly. "I know what you're up to. I do believe you're turning out to be a *wolf*. But I'll let you have *one* kiss. Just a little one. Don't smear my lipstick."

Slightly dizzy, Fred found her in his arms, her lips against his.

"That's enough, Fred," she murmured embarrassedly, pushing him away. "I feel so *funny*. It my lipstick mussed?" She stood on tiptoe, her hands against his chest, pursing her lips. Fred bent to inspect her lipstick. "Now, no more now," she said, pushing at his chest. "I'll have to look in my mirror." She took it out of her purse and held it before her face. She darted him a smile. "I can't trust you — already," she said.

"Oh!" Sue said, staring in dismay at the spilled sugar bowl.

"Good lands, Sue," her mother exclaimed. "What's the matter with you this morning?"

"I'm nervous about going to work," Sue said, scooping up the sugar with her teaspoon. "The mobs, the elevator operators."

"Well don't pay any attention to them!" her mother said.

"Dad, will you take me to work?" Sue asked.

"Can't," Mr. Jones said. "Have to go in the other direction this morning."

"Why don't you make yourself up like an old woman?" Johnny suggested. "You've still got that gray wig from that masquerade party you went to when you were nineteen, haven't you?"

"Sometimes I think you have a brain cell somewhere under that face," Sue said.

She hurried upstairs. Ten minutes later she came down.

"What do you think?" she asked.

"All I have to say," her father said gravely, "is that you're the first old lady I ever saw that I had an overpowering impulse to chase after."

"Me too," Johnny said. "Darling, say the word and make me the happiest brother in the world." He batted his eyelids rapidly.

"Oh shut up," Sue said. She rested her chin on one finger, thinking. "I have it! That old hat with a veil that Mom got for uncle Char-

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lie's funeral."

"I'll get it, Sue," her mother said, wiping her hands on her apron.

When she returned with it Sue put it on and pulled the veil down. The close mesh of the black veil completely obscured her features.

"Hmm," her father said, flavoring his reactions thoughtfully. "I think you'll need an old coat, too. I still have that *impulse.*"

"A cane would help too," Johnny said.

"Don't overdo it, Sue" her mother said. "You'll have the young men fighting over which one's going to help you across the street."

And that, approximately, was the way things went.

"Fifth floor," Sue muttered as she stepped into the elevator. When the doors closed she knew that at least half the men crowding around her had no business in the building.

"Yes, Mam," the elevator operator said respectfully, as he started up. "Which room do you want, Mam?"

"Five oh — " She stopped as she saw the ring of eager ears. "None of your business, young man," she snapped, frowning under the opaque veil.

As she stepped out of the elevator on the fifth floor the operator took one of her elbows and some stranger the other.

"*I'll* help you to the office where you're going, Mam," the operator said, glaring at his rival.

"I don't need any help," Sue said irritably, trying to shake free. "Which way is five oh four?"

"This way, Mam," the operator said, guiding her.

And from the sounds of the footsteps behind her Sue knew that the entire elevator load was following after her.

"Thank you, young ma — men," she said, gently disengaging herself and placing her back against the door. "Now if you'll all go on about your business . . ."

She stared at the wall of worshipping eyes, sighed tiredly, and twisted the knob, backing into the office. They were still there when the door cut them off.

"You must have the wrong office," she heard Mr. Wright's voice behind her. She turned eagerly.

"Oh no," she said, pulling the veil up over the hat and smiling at him.

He frowned in puzzled surprise.

"What — " he began. "You must have been out of work a long time to be down to — this." His gesture included all her attire.

Sue stared at him. There was no indication that he felt any attraction toward her. Relief and disappointment clashed within her as she pulled off the hat and wig, letting her shining golden hair cascade down around her shoulders.

There was a hall tree in the corner. She plunked the wig on one peg with the hat still on it, and hung her mother's old summer coat on another.

"I'm ready," she said breathlessly, poising before him and looking up at his scowling face.

"You're five minutes late," he said, frowning at his watch. "You'll have

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to be here on the dot after this. One thing I expect is punctuality."

"Yes, Mr. Wright," she said.

"And when there's no work, like this morning," he went on, "you are to remain at your desk looking attentive. Your lunch hour will be from eleven-thirty to twelve-thirty. Closing time is five o'clock, and not a minute before. If we get this clear from the start there should be no trouble."

"Yes, Mr. Wright," Sue said.

Fred looked over at the wig and shabby coat on the hall tree.

"Are you going to wear those things to work every day?" he asked darkly.

"Oh no!" Sue said. "Just until — until the vitamins wear off," she finished lamely.

"Vitamins?" Fred echoed.

"Yes," Sue said. "I took too many of them. They crept up on me." She took a deep breath, worry appearing on her face. "At least I hope it was the vitamins."

The door burst open suddenly, bringing with it a gust of Eau d'Jour smacking of lilacs and vanilla, and a vibrant collection of feminine attributes embodied in one package.

"Good morning, Fred dahling," Doris sang.

Then she brought up short, her eyes taking in the radiant golden waves of Sue's hair, sensing the irresistable attraction of her toward men.

"Uh, my secretary," Fred said. "Miss Jones, Miss ah Doris."

He tried to remember if Doris had told him her last name. He couldn't remember it.

"But *dahling*," Doris said in dismay. "I didn't know you had hired a girl already. I was going to speak to you today about a — a friend of mine for the job."

"Sorry," Fred said. "Too late now."

He was watching Sue's face closely. An exultant glee was glowing in his mind. At the same time he was comparing the two girls and finding Miss Jones infinitely more appealing. Even now while her eyes were angry and hurt. And he was wondering why he should feel such unholy glee at her being upset.

"Come into the inner office, Doris," he suggested.

"Oh I can't," Doris said, tittering deliciously. "You know I must get to work, silly. You can *wait* until this evening." She swayed over to him with feline grace and patted his cheek with a gloved hand. "You're so sweet to me, dahling — but I must be going now." She went to the door, turned and paused. "See you at lunch time dahling." Then she was gone.

"Huh?" Fred grunted, starting toward the door as it closed. He quickly covered up, but not before Sue had noticed and realized Doris had trapped him into a luncheon date.

"Want to borrow my wig?" she asked. But her malicious smirk couldn't hide the hurt jealousy that filled her mind. She bit her lip and turned away, going to her desk. She didn't look up when Fred went

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into his inner office. And after the door had closed, leaving her alone, she puzzled over what had happened.

"It almost seems like I've known Fred — " A resentment rose in her that she had learned his first name from that loathsome *thing*. "That I've known Fred for much longer than just yesterday. For thousands of years!" she thought wonderingly. "I guess that must be love," she concluded. "But why did he seem almost to *want* to hurt me? His asking her into his office was just to hurt me. I'm sure of that." She thought about that angle for a while and lamely concluded that "Maybe it was love. Maybe he loves me too. But he's the only man I've seen since *it* happened that didn't come right out and drool over me." She thought about that a while. "Maybe that's why I fell in love with him," she decided.

And Fred, in his private office, sat down by the ticker tape machine, scowling darkly.

"Why did I encourage Doris?" he asked himself. "I don't even like her. I feel like a minnow on a big hook with her." He thought about it and remembered that he had taken her out and cultivated her acquaintance to *get at* Miss Jones. "Or did Doris force me to go out with her?" he asked himself, utterly confused.

"And why do I want to *get at* Miss Jones?" he asked himself, glaring at the figures pouring forth on the tape, studying them with half his mind.

The figures seemed to slip through his conscious mind to somewhere *in back*. He consciously sensed this, but didn't wonder about it. Suddenly he scooped up the phone, the one with the private wire to the Exchange.

"Buy fifty thousand bushels of wheat on margin," he said. He listened a moment. "Yes, I know . . . sell when it goes up five cents, which should be in about two hours."

He dropped the phone and glared at the ticker tape. Suddenly he leaped up and went to the door, sticking his head out.

"Miss Jones!" he said curtly. "What's your first name?"

Sue glanced up at his scowling countenance.

"Susy," she said. "Susy Jones."

Slowly, ever so slowly, a vision rose in Fred's conscious mind. It was a vision of a complex machine, a universe of wheels and wheels within wheels, wheels meshed together by fine teeth, wheels touching and yet slipping, catching sometimes and then slipping again. And each wheel was some stock, or some grain or farm product, ultimately, but idealized into abstract figures on a strip of paper fed out from a clattering device under a bell jar.

He made no attempt to analyze this vision nor even to understand it. Half the time he wasn't directly aware of it, but only of its presence.

And somewhere within the complex structure lurked a mind that touched it here and there and there with delicate, probing fingers. Each time that happened he scooped up the phone and issued orders to buy or sell.

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It didn't occur to him to question.

"I have a natural flair for this," he decided. "My hunches work."

At eleven thirty he asked for his credit and learned he had made almost a million and a half dollars. At eleven thirty-two he was called and told that five men were being assigned to his private wire so that he would receive instant attention at all times.

For the first time he paused to feel afraid.

"A million and a half bucks!" he whispered. "Maybe I should quit. This can't last. Every hunch has been right. Why, I even made ten thousand bucks by buying oats on the upgrade and selling five minutes later when it went a quarter of a cent higher!"

But his fear was pushed aside by the *machine* that had come into being in his mind. His hand scooped the phone, his voice uttered terse orders, without his conscious mind understanding what went on. Nor did he wonder how it had come about, and why.

Twelve-twenty came. The door opened.

"Hello, dahling! You busy?"

Fred jerked his head around at the sound and groaned.

"Just a minute, Doris," he said. He scooped up the phone "I'm going to lunch," he said. "Let's see now. Sell wheat . . . it's down an eighth? Wait till it comes up—which should be shortly. Take a two-point profit on it. Close out Akbar radio. It's uncertain right now. . . ."

Five minutes later he had finished giving directions for the coming hour's activity. He stood up and stretched.

Doris, a dumfounded expression on her face, approached him timidly. She knew just enough about the market to realize that here was no small-time operator.

Fred blinked. His attention hooked onto her expression. He chuckled and brushed her lips absently.

"Let's go," he said.

"What about my lunch hour?" Sue asked as he reached the hall door. "It's from twelve-thirty to one-thirty."

"Oh," Fred said. He glanced at his watch. "Almost that time now." He glanced at Doris, an amused thought growing in his mind. "Why don't you come with us, Susy?"

"I wouldn't think of intruding, Mr. Wright," Sue said. "I'm sure you'll enjoy Doris's company more — *alone.*"

Doris smiled at Sue frigidly and took Fred's arm.

"Come dahling," she said. "No doubt Susy has other plans. Don't you Susy?" She laughed gaily and led Fred out the door.

Sue stared at the closing door. Then she started in surprise. One instant it had been about half closed, still closing slowly. The next instant it was closed. Just like that, and with no slam.

She glanced at her watch. It was twenty-five to one. The moment before it had been twelve twenty-nine. Six minutes gone.

"Must have been daydreaming,"

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she thought, jumping up. "How can I go out to lunch?" she exclaimed.

She took out her mirror and looked at herself critically. Her hair was still a brilliant gold, her skin still a radiant picture of loveliness.

Exasperated, she took the business phone directory. Shortly she was giving her order for lunch.

At two Fred strode into the office looking more than slightly harassed. He stopped when he saw the empty tray. His eyes went from it to the wig on the hall tree, his lips twisting into a smile.

He looked from the wig to the desk, his eyes avoiding Sue. There was a paper back book open on the desk. He went over and picked it up, avoiding Sue's alarmed clutch at it.

"Hmm," he said ponderously. "SIN ON THE BEACH. Red sin at that. A girl who wears a veil and gray wig to stave off her *thousands* of admirers — and reads trash like this to get a thrill."

He laid the book down carefully, glanced meaningfully at the wig, and snorted in obvious skepticism.

"I notice you enjoyed *your* admirer," Sue said. But Fred was already halfway to the door of his office and pretended not to hear.

"Huh!" Fred thought as he closed the door. "Damn employees. "I'm beginning to understand the trouble my old boss always had. The nerve of her making a crack like that." But his anger was directed primarily at his own inner reaction of elation at Sue's dig. It gave away her feeling toward him.

He went to the phone and scooped it to his ear.

"I'm back from lunch now," he said. He listened, his eyes widening in amazement. "Say that again," he said curtly.

"We all thought you were crazy when you countermanded your first instructions before going to lunch," the voice came over the phone. "To take a loss at that time and sink every cent in those unlisted shares seemed sheer insanity. But less than five minutes after we bought them the announcement was made that the ore was there. You can sell right now at two point four, a profit of two point three."

"Sell!" Fred said. He slammed the receiver and strode back to the door. "Susy," he said ominously.

"Yes?" she said, glancing up from her book. Inside she was wondering at the feeling that possessed her. It was one of almost fiendish elation.

"Were you using my private wire to the Exchange while I was gone?" he asked, trying to stifle the insane laughter that flooded into his mind.

"No, of course not," Sue said. "Why?"

"My instructions to the Exchange just before lunch were countermanded by someone using a voice just like mine," he said quietly. said.

"But no one's been in there!" Sue said.

"It's all right," Fred said, grinning. "I wasn't wiped out, if that was what was intended. I made twenty million dollars while I was

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having lunch — with Doris."

Sue started at him blankly, wondering what he was talking about. But she wondered more at the sudden cessation of the feeling of glee that had possessed her, and the upsurge of anger and disappointment that took its place.

Suddenly she remembered those six minutes she had lost while apparently sitting at her desk daydreaming.

"Fred!" she exclaimed, jumping up and coming toward him. "I — I'm afraid! Something's happening — happened, to both of us. I *know* you weren't always like you are now. I just *feel* it. M-maybe it isn't vitamins."

"Go back to your desk!" he said harshly. The very fierceness of his tones made her bring up sharply.

"Y-yes Fred," she said in a small voice.

"Read your RED SIN ON THE BEACH," he went on. "Live in your *dream world.*" He glanced meaningfully at the gray wig, chuckled, and slammed the door when he went back into his office.

Sue went back to her desk and pouted at the door. Its blank oak panelling was unresponsive.

Suddenly she took her book and threw it forcefully into the wastebasket.

"I'll show you, you — " she said aloud.

She opened her purse and took out mirror and lipstick, applying the crimson carefully. Then she went to the hall door and went out.

Fred returned to the ticker tape. He scowled at it darkly, trying to still the disturbing thoughts Sue's remark had brought up into consciousness. She was right. He hadn't always been this way. Just — three days! Was that all the longer it had been? That was all!

"But how did she know?" he asked himself. "And what made her act afraid out there?"

No answer came to his mind. He had an impulse to go out and ask her, but decided that definitely was the last thing he would do.

He forced his mind to calm down, and gradually the vision of the complex machine grew strong in his mind. More and more of its wheels meshed into alignment.

His deals grew greater and greater. The voices at the other end of the wire grew tight and strained from the mental pressure of the magnitude of the continuing operations.

New factors began to enter in. Bulls and bears were sensing his activities, trying to outguess him or divine his plans and play along. He took a deliberate loss of two million dollars once to shake some of them off into bankruptcy, then recouped his loss in a brilliant combination.

From somewhere, perhaps outside the building, he decided, conversation was filtering into the room. Distracting conversation. A radio started blaring out music.

He brushed off this annoyance and concentrated more intently on the ticker returns. The Market was fast

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becoming a vast orchestra, and he the conductor, standing on the podium, waving his wand to the strings and bringing the flood of credit pouring out into his account, pointing imperiously to the brass and causing it to flood in his direction.

Then suddenly he scooped up the phone angrily.

"Sell!" he said. "Sell everything at current listing or not less than a point and a half under. Hold everything that won't go. That's all until tomorrow."

He banged the receiver down and strode to the office door, flinging it open.

His flaming eyes settled first on the three policemen, going from them to the half dozen men in business suits, the three in elevator operators' uniforms. The radio that was blaring was on Sue's desk. She herself was perched there, one leg swinging lazily in time to the loud music.

"Ain't that funny?" a man in an elevator starter's uniform shouted above the noise of the music. "I come in here to fire you guys for leaving your elevators, and now I may get fired myself." He laughed uproariously.

"Susy!" Fred shouted. "Where'd these—clunks come from?"

She turned at the sound of his voice and wrinkled her nose at him, shaking her head and spreading her arms.

"They just came along when I came back from getting a coke," she shouted.

"Well get them out of here!" Fred screamed.

Sue turned the radio down to a whisper.

"This your boss?" one of the men said belligerently. "You don't have to work for this punk. How much does he pay you? I'll double it."

"Why you—" Fred said, advancing with doubled fists. The man who had spoken stepped forward to meet him, a twisted leer of confidence on his face.

"Stop! All of you!" Sue said. "I'll remember your offer," she said sweetly to the man. "Now all of you'd better go. Go on, now." She shooed them airily with her hands.

Grinning, they sidled out the door, the man who had offered Sue a job going last. He leered at Fred.

"Hiding behind a woman's apron strings," he said derisively as the door closed gently in his face.

"Why you bas—" Fred said, starting after him.

"Fred!" Sue said, holding onto his coat sleeve.

She held on while he relaxed into trembling, indignant immobility. Then she let go and stood back.

He let a long breath escape and wiped a hand over his face. His eyes went to the gray wig, the hat with its heavy veil, and the sloppy coat on the hall tree.

He turned and grinned wryly at her.

"Better wear that outfit after this when you go out," he said. "Wear it home from work." He started toward the inner office.

"Fred," Sue said.

"Yes?" he said, turning.

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"Are—are you going out with Doris tonight?"

"Yes," he said.

"Oh," she said weakly.

He looked at her, his face twisting queerly, then turned abruptly and went on into his office.

Sue stepped down off the streetcar. Five men erupted from the door as the car started up. She ignored them. When the car had gone on she bent forward at the hips, hunched one shoulder up, and started walking with a pigeon-toed bent-kneed wobble, her shapeless coat flopping, her face a dark obscurity behind the heavy veil, the black hat and gray, lifeless wig concealing her golden waves of hair.

The men followed her doubtfully, obviously fighting an inner struggle between common sense and something they didn't comprehend.

One by one they dropped back and returned to the carline to catch the next car.

As she made her way slowly down the block and a half to the house each man she passed paused and turned to watch her, a frown of puzzlement on his face.

"I'm home, Mom," she shouted wearily as the front door shut. She took off the hat and wig, tossing them in a chair.

"I was watching from the upstairs window," Mrs. Jones said hurrying down the stairs. "I would never have believed it the way men go after you now. I do believe if you went to work in a piano box they'd follow it and wonder what was making them do it!" She helped Sue off with the coat. "There's been a couple of phone calls for you," she said casually.

"Who?" Sue asked eagerly.

"The list is by the phone," her mother said.

Sue ran into the kitchen to the phone. She picked up the slip of paper.

"Oh, Mo-om!" she said contritely. "You must have been answering the phone all afternoon!"

"Just since about three," Mrs. Jones said from the doorway, smiling tenderly.

Sue glanced over the list. Some of the names seemed vaguely familiar. One was the man who had offered her a job. Carl Stillwell.

Her eyes lit up fiendishly. She shook her head, smiled mischievously, then shook her head firmly, putting the list down.

"Aren't you going to call any of them?" her mother asked. "You gave them your number."

"No," Sue said. "They were all in the office this afternoon. One of them must have swiped something out of my purse with my name and address on it. A letter maybe, and they all saw it."

"You want to be careful, Sue," Mrs. Jones said.

"Yes," Sue said. "Careful. But I would like to go out, while I have the chance. How would you like to go along as chaperone, Mom?"

The sign said CHEERIO in large cheerful script. Carl Stillwell tooled his Lincoln to a soundless stop directly in front. A uniformed doorman

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opened the car doors.

"I wish you'd settle down in one spot," Mrs. Jones complained. "This is the seventh spot we've been to in the last hour."

"What's the difference, Mother," Carl said jovially, giving Sue an expansive wink. "Just enjoy yourself. I'll bet you haven't had such a nice time since Mr. Jones was courting you."

"If he'd brought me into one of these places I'd never have married him," Mrs. Jones sniffed. "I hate the smell of spilled beer on linoleum, and they all have it."

Carl gave Sue another elaborate wink and helped Mrs. Jones out of the car with extreme solicitude.

The doorman stared at Sue as the three went into the club, clamped his jaw firmly, and went to a phone in the wall beside the door to call the parking lot.

Sue hurried ahead of her mother and Carl, peering above the crowds in a frantic survey of the place. She began to dance excitedly.

"Hurry, Mom. Check your coat, Carl," she said with happy impatience. "Let's get a table."

She brushed off the constant bobbing up of males asking her to dance, drink, or anything she chose, with an experienced hand. Carl appeared magically at her side, his white shirt front radiating success.

"*Mais oui,*" the headwaiter said in response to his curt nod, and led the way through the pack while he dragged Mrs. Jones and clung to Sue's arm.

At the table the headwaiter held Sue's chair back for her, ignoring Carl's frown.

"Your coat, Ma'mselle," he said firmly, and when she glanced up at him with a smile of thanks he returned it with a Continental one, his eyes fixed on hers. "I weel wait on Ma'mselle personal," he said, bowing. "Eet weel be an honair."

"That will be all, Pierre," Carl said. "We will require the services only of the bartender."

"I haff said I weel wait on the Ma'mselle personal," the headwaiter said with firm politeness. "Eet weel be zee honair!" He stuck out his jaw firmly and smiled graciously at Sue.

"Go 'way, Pierre," Sue said gayly.

"As you weesh, Ma'mselle," the headwaiter said, bowing low, and suddenly seizing her hand and kissing her arm halfway between the wrist and the elbow.

His black eyes stared defiantly at Carl, then returned to Sue. He retreated into the background where he stood, still staring at her.

"Let's dance, Carl," Sue said eagerly.

"With pleasure," he said. "Order whatever you want, Mother, while we're gone. We'll order drinks when we come back."

Sue let him lead for the first few steps, then started steering. Carl stumbled.

"I'm awfully sorry, Sue—my darling," he said contritely.

"My fault," Sue said. But she blithely continued steering, her partner growing more and more flustered.

Suddenly Sue stopped and stepped back.

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"Why Fred!" she exclaimed. "And Doris! What a surprise!" She smiled at them innocently. They stared back at her blankly.

She darted a look around and seized an empty chair at the next table, sliding it over and plunking herself down.

"Won't you join us?" Fred said frigidly to Carl. His eyes widened in recognition.

A waiter had hurried up and now brought a chair for Carl, then hovered over the table waiting for the order.

"Do you mean to tell me, Susy, that you went out with—this?" Fred asked incredulously.

"No hard feelings," Carl said good naturedly. "You've just lost your secretary, that's all. She's going to work for me. Aren't you Sue? At a hundred a week."

"I'm dying of thirst," Sue said, ignoring Carl's question. She looked at Doris' two full-jigger glasses. "Do you mind, dahling?" she asked, seizing one of them. "The waitah cawn bring you anothah."

Doris made a frantic effort to grab it, but Sue put it to her lips, her smile taunting. She sipped. Her eyes widened in surprise.

"Why Doris!" she said. "That's nothing but cold tea! I thought it was whiskey. What a strange thing to serve tea in."

"Tea?" Carl exclaimed. He stared at Doris and started laughing, slapping his knee and doubling over. "So you're nothing but a B girl. Fred, I'm amazed. You out with a B girl?" He broke into paroxysms of laughter again, this time slapping Sue's knee gently, letting his hand rest there for a moment, squeezing.

Sue firmly disengaged his hand, smiling sweetly at Doris.

"Tell me about it, Doris," she said. "I don't quite understand."

"It's simple," Carl said. "They have an agreement with the management. They bring in their sucker—I mean friend, and drink tea instead of liquor. Gallons of it, at a buck and a half a throw. Their code number goes on the check and the management pays them seventy-five cents a drink later."

"That's not true!" Doris said. "I—I don't drink. I arrange with the management to have them serve me tea for that reason. Nothing more. I don't get anything out of it."

"You don't like to drink?" Fred said. "Why didn't you tell me, Doris? I don't either. We could have gone someplace where they don't serve drinks. I know a swell place. I went there once, before—well, a month or two ago."

"Before what?" Sue asked, looking at him with a strained expression.

"You unspeakable cat!" Doris said suddenly, turning on Sue. "You did this deliberately. You knew where we were going. He told you!"

"I did not," Fred said.

"Too bad you didn't," Carl said, a twinkle in his eye. "It would have saved us going to seven other places first."

"See?" Doris said to Fred. "It's the same thing. She hunted us down. You have to discharge her. Right now. She can't wor—"

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"He can't fire her," Carl said, his whole body shaking with laughter. "I hired her already at a hundred a week. She quit. Remember?"

"I did not quit," Sue said firmly. "I'm not going to quit." She pouted prettily and nodded once in determination.

"Your ORDER, M'sieus," the waiter shouted.

"Bring the lady another jigger of tea," Sue said. "With lemon."

"But I do not onnerstan," the waiter said. "We do not zee tea serve here." His expression of puzzled confusion was perfect, though he had stood there all the time.

"Bring some good honest Bourbon all around," Carl said. "And don't make any of them 'zee tea,' because you do not it here serve."

"Oui, M'sieu," the waiter said, bowing and scurrying away. As he passed a man with massive shoulders who was moving in casually, he nodded grimly. The man looked over the heads of people at the tables and nodded expressionlessly to two other similar men converging on the table.

"Fred dahling," Doris said, starting to rise, "I refuse to stay here and be insulted by these—these *drunks* any longer."

"Watch your language, B girl," Carl said darkly. "If you start anything and we get run in they'll damn well soon bring out your record. And don't say you haven't one. I never saw a B girl yet that didn't—"

"That's enough of your insolence!" Fred said. "I should have knocked you silly this afternoon. Then I wouldn't have to now."

"You and who else?" Carl said. "I've seen your kind before. A fly-by-night. Open an office for a week and vanish."

"You asked for it," Fred said, turning a beet red at this close shot at the truth. He pulled back his arm, getting ready for what he hoped would be a solid haymaker.

"That's far enough," a voice said behind him. At the same time Fred felt his arms pinned behind him.

"Let go," Fred said. "He's got it coming."

"Pay your bill and get out," the bouncer said.

"Let me go," Fred said. "And I'm not paying my bill. Not after you butting in like this."

"You asked for it, mister," the man said. He released Fred's arms and touched him briefly behind the left ear with a fist of solid bone. Fred's eyes started to turn inward, then closed. He slumped in his chair.

The bouncer lifted him to his feet. The one who had been behind Carl leaped around. Between them they held Fred up, with his feet dragging, as they propelled him toward the exit.

Carl watched them go, a wide grin on his face. Then he turned to grin at Sue. Her chair was empty. He looked over at Doris, a speculative light in his eyes.

"Oooooh," Fred groaned, his eyes creaking open and falling shut again. They remained closed a full three seconds, then popped wide open. He stared at Sue accusingly.

He struggled to sit up and sank back with another moan, rubbing the

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back of his head tenderly.

"Here's a taxi, finally," Mrs. Jones said, while Fred opened his eyes again and blinked in her direction.

"Easy, Fred," Sue said tenderly. "I'll help you up."

With her help he managed to get up off the sidewalk and stand tottering precariously while the taxi driver looked on enviously.

"Over this way, Fred," Sue said soothingly. "Mom, help us."

Silent for once, Mrs. Jones obeyed. Between them they eased Fred into the taxi and climbed in beside him.

"Where to?" the driver said, looking back at them brightly. He looked at Sue hungrily and added, "I'll trade places with him any day."

"To the hospital!" Sue said.

"No!" Fred said. "No, wait. Let me think."

"Maybe we should take him home with us, Sue," Mrs. Jones said. "Then we can call a doctor."

"No, no," Fred said, holding his head between his hands. "Take me to —to twenty-six forty-one Archer."

The driver started the taxi. Sue put her arm around Fred, pulling his head onto her shoulder and pressing her cheek against it.

"Poor Fred," she soothed.

The taxi bounced along in silence for several blocks.

"I wondered how she could drink thirty-seven jiggers of Bourbon," Fred mumbled. Several blocks later he said, "And last night it was forty-two!"

Sue pressed her cheek against Fred's hair more firmly, a tear welling out of her eye. Mrs. Jones sniffed loudly. A moment later she blew her nose.

The cab came to a stop. The driver switched on the interior light and pulled the tab from the meter.

"A buck sixty-five," he said.

Mrs. Jones opened her purse and brought out some change. Sue helped Fred while her mother was paying the bill. A moment later they were on the sidewalk, Fred swaying unsteadily while Sue and her mother held him erect.

Sue was looking up at the shoddy front of the rooming house. She glanced doubtfully at the number. It was 2641.

"This is it, I guess," she said. "Well, come on, Mom. Let's get him inside."

Carl's voice whispered gloatingly in her mind. *"I've seen your kind before. A fly-by-night. Open an office for a week and vanish."* She thrust it away angrily.

They propelled Fred laboriously up the stone steps. Inside the entrance Sue found his name on the directory. It took them ten minutes to get him up to the fourth floor. There they went down the narrow hall to 4C.

"Have you got your key on you, Fred?" Sue asked.

He fumbled in his pocket, bringing out the key. She put it in the lock. When she twisted it the door opened. Her first casual glimpse of the interior led her to believe Fred had everything packed and ready to move. But after she and her mother had helped him through the door and into a motheaten chair she took a second look. It made her change her mind.

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There was case upon case piled about the room, each with neatly typed lists of some kind pasted on them. In one corner of the room was a glass showcase. On its shelves, neatly arrayed, were coins. Coins of all colors, sizes and shapes.

"What'd you bring me here for!" Fred's angry voice sounded behind her. She turned. He was sitting up, every muscle tense with rage. "Get out!" he said. "Get out! At once!"

"That's a fine way to act—" Mrs. Jones began indignantly. Sue caught her eye and shook her head. Her mother stopped.

"I'll see you in the morning, Fred," Sue said. "Come on, mother." She watched Fred apprehensively as she went to the door. He started to say something twice, but didn't. Outside on the way down the stairs Sue said to her mother, "Well, at least he didn't fire me. I thought he was going to."

"Good morning, Fred," Sue said, her smile masking her apprehension and worry. She had arrived at the office at eight-thirty to be there ahead of him—and now it was nearly ten-thirty.

Fred placed his topcoat and hat on the hall tree beside the wig, veiled hat, and shapeless woman's coat without answering, his face set stubbornly. But as he turned to go to the inner office the inner struggle flowed into his features.

"H'lo Susy," he said curtly. "Sorry about last night in my room. Don't know what came over me."

He started to pass her.

"I'm sorry about last night too," she said. "It was simply awful what I did. I mean—I wouldn't blame you if you fired me—" she ended on a miserable note.

He paused at the door and looked back at her.

"I guess I was intoxi—cated . . ." she added. His expression didn't relent. "It gave me nightmares when I went to sleep," she added brightly.

"God!" Fred groaned, passing the back of his hand over his eyes. "I had nightmares too. I dreamed I was down under the bottom of the ocean, buried in mud. I was trying to breathe and couldn't. I was straining to break free of the mud and stand up, and all I could do was move just a little bit, then the mud would suck me back down with horrible sucking sounds. It woke me up, and when I went back to sleep I had the nightmare all over again."

The mild slam of the door startled Sue. Fred's words had filled her with a nameless alarm so intense that she had concentrated on it, wondering as to its cause. She hadn't noticed him go on into the inner office.

Impulsively she started after him, then stopped. No use forcing him to order her out of his inner office too, she decided. She sat down at her own desk, still feeling a vague alarm.

"Maybe his nightmare means something!" she decided.

She brought out the phone book.

"Hello, George," she said when she got her party. "This is Sue Jones. Remember me? You took me to a dance once about a year ago. I

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wanted to ask you about something." She spoke rapidly. "You said you knew a lot about the meanings of dreams. Would you tell me the meaning of a dream a friend of mine had? I mean right now over the phone. It'll only take a minute to give you the idea of it, and I think it's very vital. Okay, here it is. He dreamed he was down under the bottom of the ocean in a deep bed of silt and was trying to stand up and couldn't. He couldn't breathe either. It scared him so much he woke up, but when he went back to sleep he had the nightmare all over again."

"The symbolic meaning is obvious," George's voice came. "Down under the ocean symbolized being literally swamped with trouble. Buried in the mud is the same, except that it also symbolizes suffocation by something that clings and draws you back down when you try to escape. Shortness of breath symbolizes terror. In other words, the poor guy probably has a gal on the string who won't let him go. It wouldn't be you would it?" The chuckle was good-naturedly impersonal.

"That's not a bit funny," Sue said. "No. It's not me."

"Sorry," George said contritely. "Of course, it could mean something else. Financial difficulty would be more probably it. That would be more likely to create the 'being mired in mud' symbol, because financial situations can't be escaped so easily."

"I think you're getting close," Sue said eagerly.

"But," George's voice grew serious, "it can also mean something even more serious than that. Nightmares like that are often the prelude to nervous breakdown brought on by pressure of overwork and circumstances out of the person's control. Sometimes it even leads to suicide. Frankly, if I had a nightmare like that and didn't know what caused it I'd go to a psychiatrist right away and get at the cause of it."

"Maybe that's why it alarmed me so when he told me," Sue said. "Thanks, George. Thanks."

"Don't mention it," George said. "Anything else?"

"Well . . ." she hesitated. "No, I guess that's all."

His sigh of relief was audible on the phone.

Sue smiled as she hung up. Maybe George would hear how beautiful she was now and regret not having tried to date her again when he had the chance.

Then she frowned. How could she have told him of her own dream? Or was it a dream? It had seemed so real. She had just woke up, apparently, and gone to the bathroom, and in the bathroom mirror she had seen her reflection—and her hair was a dead yellow, her skin lifeless, as it had been before—before—

She had run back to bed and lain there trembling. And then suddenly it had been morning, and when she looked in her dresser mirror her hair was a radiant gold, her skin lovely . . .

Fred stood with his back to the door after he entered his inner office, and closed his eyes, feeling the *at-*

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mosphere of the place settle over him. For the space of a full minute he stood there, the events of the night before, the recurring nightmare, everything, slipping away as the clouds and the rain sweep on.

When he opened his eyes his features were completely relaxed. He crossed to his desk and lifted the private phone to the Stock Exchange.

"Good morning, sir," a familiar voice sounded. And it was not a voice, but a fine little wheel in the vastly intricate machine emerging into consciousness from the back of his mind.

But even as he heard one part of his mind answer the voice he was staring in surprise at the machine, seeing it with new eyes, or from a new perspective of the whole.

That was it, he decided. From a new perspective. Besides the wheels and cogs and wheels within wheels, there were countless little hammers or tappets, idle, but ready to start in motion.

Strange. He hadn't seen them before. Yet they were so essential to the operation of the machine.

"Good morning," he heard himself say. "For the first half hour this morning buy. Television, major industrial, a general buying spree. Enough of each to get noticed. Pick inactive stocks where you can, and if you find some not available offer five points above the listing."

He hung up and bent over the ticker tape, one part of his mind reading what it said, the other puzzling over this new conception of the financial machine in his mind.

Into his thoughts came the voice of a fight commentator he had listened to once over the television while watching a heavy-weight championship bout.

"The champion was feeling him out, measuring him, in those first rounds. . . . Now he has him figured and is moving in, moving in, slowly taking over the initiative with swift skillful taps not designed to hurt but merely sound out the challenger . . ."

And that was about it, Fred decided. Up to now he had capitalized on the vagaries of the natural market, winning by a succession of lucky guesses backed by his new *sense.* Now he had the capital, the strength, to stir sluggish fields into action, so that he could widen his operations.

He could take losses of millions of dollars and quickly recoup them, and more . . .

"Sell! Sell! I want sales volume in that stock," he heard his unemotional voice say into the phone . . .

"Five points over list won't entice out any more of that? Then offer to buy for two points under. In ten minutes drop the offer another point. Smoke it out . . ."

"It's offered now? At market? Buy, then offer it three points below market . . ."

And the bright little hammers in the machine tapped bright little pins that went down, and rose to be tapped down again, lower and lower —until suddenly there were other little hammers tapping, tapping . . .

The voices of the men at the Exchange were taking on that scared,

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tense tone again. They were the little fiddle players, their eyes on the conductor's baton, their arms sawing frantically at their violins when its slim, beautiful length told them to, their minds sensing vaguely the grandeur and magnitude of the music their feeble notes blended into.

The office phone rang. Fred scooped it up.

"It's twelve-thirty," Sue's voice sounded. "I'm ordering my lunch sent up. Should I order you anything?"

"No—wait!" Fred said. "Yes. Two cheeseburgers and a pint of coffee. Pickles." And he had forgotten it before the receiver dropped in place.

It was not Sue's gentle, then insistent knock at the door. It was not her gentle but firm pressure on his shoulder. It was the smell of the cheeseburgers signalling to his empty stomach, and his stomach's insistent signalling to his brain. He looked up from the ticker tape.

"Here's our lunch," Sue said brightly.

"Oh. Set it down, Susy." Fred smiled, turned back to the thin stream of paper from the ticker.

Sue set the tray on the desk. She pouted prettily at the nape of Fred's neck, dragged a heavy chair up close to the end of the desk and sat down.

Fred's stomach signaled again. His hand reached out blindly for a sandwich. When it seemed it would touch one Sue adroitly moved it. Finally he looked up. She smiled at him innocently, biting delicately into the cheeseburger in her hand.

"So-o-ory," Fred said. "Thought you'd gone."

He straightened up and looked at the lunch consciously.

"Nice," Sue murmured. "Try one."

Fred picked up a cheeseburger and bit into it. Then he noticed the folded newspaper. Transferring the sandwich to his left hand he opened the paper to the large block headlines.

STOCK MARKET WILD!

Suppressing a smile he skimmed the double column spread underneath. The general trend of the news story seemed to be wonder as to the cause of the sudden frenzied activity. Speculation divided in opinion between war hysteria and over-inflation of credit in the retail levels.

Prefacing the remark with a "It's too soon to know anything definite," the reporter discussed rumors that several hundred of the better known big-time gamblers on the stock market had gone broke.

On the war hysteria side several recent incidents were reviewed, each of which could be considered as an act of open aggression.

An American robot controlled survey plane had gotten "out of control" and flown over several very secret areas in Siberia, eluding the cream of Russian defenses "automatically" before being brought under control again and brought to its home base.

Russia had radioed a "frantic warning" to the world that one of its "test rockets" loaded with an atomic warhead had gone off course. Twenty minutes later it had landed on and destroyed an American military cen-

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ter in a remote part of Alaska no one had seemed to know existed. And red-faced, red-necked officials in Washington were glumly admitting the casualties would run up into the hundreds of thousands, while the President was wondering what to do about Russia's note of profuse apology and offer of reparation.

But such incidents fooled no one. They were part of the new technique in the new cold-hot phase of the East-West struggle. And neither accident was causing as much stir as the hot fight going on in the United States Nations Court over whether the United States must pay for the Russian submarine it had "unwittingly" destroyed off Whidby Island in Puget Sound where it had wandered from open sea while lost.

Things were under control. There was still no reason to expect actual war.

Fred lost interest in the newspaper and looked up at Sue with a grin.

"Good sandwich," he commented.

"Is that a ticker like they have on the Stock Exchange?" Sue asked, waving her second sandwich in the direction of the gleaming machine under the belljar.

"Why yes!" Fred said in surprise. "I thought you knew."

"Hm-mm," Sue mumbled, chewing.

She laid her sandwich down and tried to take the cap off her coffee bottle. Her fingers were too greasy. Fred took over the job. She watched him, frowning in thought.

"Fred," she said hesitantly. "Are you going broke? I mean like those other bigshots the paper mentions?"

"Lord no!" he said with an easy laugh.

"I called up a friend of mine who knows all about dreams," she went on hesitantly. "He said your dream was a dangerous one to have. He —said if he had had it he would go right to a psychiatrist."

"Anybody who'd go to a psychiatrist ought to have his head examined," Fred wisecracked. But her mention of the dream brought back its memory. A cold sweat broke out on his forehead. "Don't you think you're going too far," he said, suddenly angry, "to spend business hours discussing me over the phone with friends who advise you to tell me I'm nuts?"

"I didn't discuss you," Sue said. "I merely mentioned the gist of the dream and asked what it meant!"

"And what did he say it meant?" Fred asked coldly.

Sue picked up her coffee and sipped slowly.

"He said," she said more calmly, "that its symbolism indicates a hemming in by something insurmountable. Either financial troubles or tremendous pressure of unusual circumstances that can't be escaped."

Impulsively she set down her coffee bottle and leaned forward, placing her hand on his wrist.

"You can fire me if you want," she said, "but I know there's *something*. Sometimes I see it in your eyes. I was in doubt before, but last night—in your room—that building—"

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She stopped, searching for words. Then suddenly, biting her lips, she leaped up and went to the window, standing there with her back to the room.

"I'm going to tell *you* something," she said. "Then you'll know why I'm so sure."

She whirled to face him, taking a handful of her hair and lifting it.

"See my hair?" she said. "It's alive and golden. Three days ago, I think, though it seems years, it was a dull yellow. See my skin and my lips? They were lifeless and dull. I was so uninteresting that I couldn't hold a job. No dates. I tried everything. Even vitamins. Then," she snapped her fingers, "presto! I was like this. A boss who was in the process of telling me I was fired suddenly offered to set me up in an apartment. I had to run to get away from him. The elevator boy tried to make me. The taxi driver tried to abduct me. And it isn't just my looks, though they're a big enough miracle. With my entire body hidden under that veil and wig and coat men get off the streetcar before they get to their stop just to follow me, while they wonder why the heck they're following an old hag. It's something other than looks. A spirit maybe."

She walked over to him and looked down into his eyes.

"That's how I *know* something happened to you," she said.

He was staring up at her, a strange light in his eyes.

"Say something!" she demanded.

"Were you really like that?" he asked. "If you *were* like that maybe I wouldn't be afraid of you." He gave a snorting laugh. "Beautiful girls always did scare me."

"I wish I could believe that," Sue said, her lip trembling. "You see, *every minute I'm afraid what happened will go away. Then my world would tumble back into ruins again.*"

Fred looked over at the stock ticker and back up at Sue.

"That's my fear too," he said, his voice cutting off queerly.

"Then it's true!" Sue exclaimed.

But even as she spoke she brought her hand to her mouth and shrank back in alarm and fear at what she was seeing.

A transformation was taking place in Fred. His eyes, normally blue, were deepening into a blue-black. His hair was changing from its fine, off-platinum texture to a coarser density of shifting shades of darkening gray that rapidly became black.

An aura, a *presence,* seemed to expand from him so that it filled the room while still being contained within his body.

Even the physical mold of his features seemed to shift basically into new patterns. A double exposure effect in which the old features were still present, human and confused, while super-imposed on them were new features of haughty, inhuman ruthlessness.

The lips, somehow widened and coarsened, twisted into a slow smile as the cold inhuman black eyes bored into Sue's.

"You almost won, *Aphrodite,*" a quiet, fear-inspiring voice spoke from

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the lips that had once been Fred Wright's.

"No!" Sue breathed, and even as she uttered this protest she *knew* with a strange thrill that it was true, that the goddess Aphrodite possessed her.

"True, I can't retain full possession long," Mars said. "But it will be long enough to complete what I have been doing. The stock market is poised already for the crash. I've culled two billion dollars of quick profits from the pockets of speculators and broke them out of the market. A billion of this is invested in key securities ready for the final blow. I'm going to dump them on the market. Give them away."

"But I don't understand," Sue said, while in the back of her mind cold realization was sinking in.

"But you do, *Aphrodite*," Mars said. "The United States cannot afford a depression. The Government will in desperation have to seize on any one of the current 'acts of aggression' of her cold-hot war enemy and retaliate in all-out war." His lips parted in a confident sneer of triumph. "This is *the end* for the human race."

Sue felt something happening within her. In a distorted mental way she felt herself being set aside. Something that had been there before was closing about her, congealing, intensifying. It was not terrifying. It was indescribably wonderful. Yet it seemed not a part of her. Subtly the impressions from her own senses shifted their possessiveness so that they seemed to be second hand impressions. When she spoke she was not conscious even of speaking, but listened as though it were another person.

"Then you leave me only one course, oh Mars!" she heard her voice say, its tones clear and melodious as those of an opera queen, imperiously angry. "You bring War and I've failed to stop you. My only weapon has been Love—"

"A puny weapon," Mars sneered.

"You think so?" Aphrodite said, smiling. "I nearly beat you here. Perhaps I could still win in this office. Your vehicle loves mine, and even now fights with almost superhuman will to regain control."

"But he cannot—for a time yet," Mars said.

"Yet he tries," Aphrodite said. "He, a mere human, stands defiant of you because of Love, my one weapon against you. It's that Love that I've bred into the human race through hundreds of generations that is going to defeat you. Wait and see. I'm leaving to prepare my counter-offensive. Do you want to know what it will be? I'm perfectly willing to tell you, because you can't stop me without dropping your plans here, and if you do that there will be no war."

"What weapon could Love possibly contrive against War?" Mars asked with contemptuous humor.

"I'm going to *possess* the Helios Robot," Aphrodite said serenely.

One instant Sue was watching Mars' puzzled surprise as though through a mirror. The next, abruptly,

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it was as though she had turned about and was seeing it with her own eyes. There was a dim sensing of the departure of something from her.

Then, like gears meshing together, her thoughts crystallized into action. If Mars phoned the Exchange and gave his instructions it would precipitate war.

She ran at him, seizing him by the coat, shaking him.

"Fred!" she screamed. "Fred! Wake up!"

Mars sneered at her indifferently and pushed her away. She came back at him. His hand landed heavily on the side of her face.

She fell, her head spinning dizzily. Unable to rise, she heard him speak into the phone, giving his orders. And when she managed to rise to her feet he was standing there, a sneer of triumph on his features, the cradled phone in one hand.

From the phone dangled a short length of wire. He had pulled the phone loose from its connection. In answer to her mute questioning look he nodded.

"There will be war before the stock market closes tonight," he said. The puzzled expression returned to his face. "Tell me," he said. "What did Aphrodite mean when she said Love could still win, even with an all-out atomic war?"

Sue shrank back, trembling.

"I t ink—" Mars hesitated thoughtfully. "Yes. Things are fixed here. I think I'd better bring ships from the Moon to destroy the robot and stop whatever she plans."

As Sue watched, the black hair turned a lifeless off-color white. Fred's features altered subtly. His eyes lost their black merciless quality, becoming an absentminded blue.

He looked at Sue for a moment, then they were in each other's arms, clinging to each other, trembling. And Sue was crying.

"War has been declared," the loudspeaker plane traveling slowly a few hundred feet in the air blared loudly. "Go to your home or the nearest public place where there is a radio and become fully acquainted with the details."

Sue and Fred, hand in hand, scurried across the street behind the departing streetcar and half trotting, sped along the sidewalk.

"If the people knew it was me that caused this war—" Fred said miserably.

"It wasn't you and you know it," Sue said.

"I don't know," Fred objected. "I didn't deliberately. But I should have stopped to think. All I could think of was making money. You don't know what it does to a man to make two billion dollars in three days. I should have stopped to realize that that two billions came out of a lot of guys' pockets. And the Government. I should have realized that a depression would produce defeat for us in the cold-hot war. I should have thought of those things. So I'm to blame."

"Hurry, Fred," Sue said.

They cut across the lawn, taking the porch steps two at a time. Sue

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flung open the door.

"Mom!" she called. "I brought Fred home with me."

Mrs. Jones appeared in the kitchen doorway, wiping her hands on her apron.

"Well, how are—" she began, then stopped, her eyes widening. "Well what happened to you two?" she asked. "Sue, those vitamins wore off finally! But you, Mr. Wright! What's happened to you? You look —faded, yourself!"

"He looks nicer, don't you think, Mom?" Sue said, smiling up at Fred.

"When he looks at you the way he's doing, plain as you are, Sue," Mrs. Jones said, "he's the most welcome sight I've seen in a long time."

"Why haven't you got the radio on, Mom?" Sue asked. "Don't you know war's started?"

"War?" Mrs. Jones echoed. "Lands no. I've got two pies in the oven and supper yet to fix." She started to turn back into the kitchen, then hesitated. "Sue's a good cook too, Mr. Wright. A ver-ry good cook." She looked at him knowingly, nodded to clinch her statement, and stalked out of sight.

Fred winked at Sue. She raised up on her toes and kissed him lightly.

"Come on," she said, taking his hand and leading him into the living room. She took off the black hat with its turned-up veil, shaking out her yellow hair. The hat sailed carelessly onto the davenport while she turned on the television.

"Thank God I don't have to wear this old sack," she said, shrugging off her mother's old summer coat. "See if you can get channel eleven working, Fred. I'm going to put this away in the closet."

She started past him. He started toward the radio.

"Well?" she said, turning toward him and pouting.

He looked around questioningly. His face lit up with a happy smile.

"Say! You really look pretty when you pout, Susy," he said.

"Thank you kind sir, she said," Sue recited, bowing. She danced out of the room with the old coat over her arm, humming gaily.

Fred bent over the radio, a contented smile playing at his lips. His off-color white hair was already exploring for its former habits, seeking plane layers that tended to make it look like wind-lifted shingles.

The news commentator's face jumped across the screen several times. When it settled down it looked out with features lined with concern, lips moving inaudibly.

"Hey, Susy! Where's the volume on this thing?" Fred called. Then, absently, "Oh, here it is . . ."

". . . our survey plane which went out of control into Soviet territory ten days ago," the announcer said. "It can be revealed now that the pictures it brought back showed large troop movements entirely out of proportion with anything other than immediate aggressive war. Our instruments detected over eight hundred atom bombs already loaded into place.

"The destruction of our defense center in Northern Alaska as every-

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one knows had to be a deliberate act. It could be only a prelude to actual war. There was no time for presentation of these facts before the United Nations Court. In fact, it has been pretty generally accepted that when actual war came it would come too fast for United Nation action."

"You've got it?" Sue asked unnecessarily as she came back into the room.

"Yeah," Fred grunted.

"On the floor of the United Nations Assembly room our reporters are getting the views of as many foreign representatives as they can. These views are pretty unanimous in the opinion that our declaration of war against Russia preceded what was to have been an all-out surprise attack on us by not more than a few hours."

The commentator's attention switched to something off the screen. He frowned and faced the screen again.

"Right now," he said gravely, "the two greatest military powers the world has ever known face each other across the globe, each hesitating, on the alert for the first hint of movement from the other, tensely ready to try to parry that first and possibly fatal thrust. Will the Russians launch their already prepared attack? Or will the United States launch several hundred of its new globe circling Hydrogen Bomb rockets?"

The commentator again looked to one side, annoyance crossing his face. He dipped his head. Another man appeared in the screen and handed him a paper. Frowning, he read it.

"Here's an unexpected development," he said. "Down around the Mediterranean, at Rhodes, the report states, there are wild rumors of a giant metal man varying in height with the observer, but apparently somewhere between two hundred feet and two hundred yards tall." The commentator snorted skeptically. "The reports claim that he rose out of the sea, tons of silt flowing off his massive shoulders, causing waves that upset good-sized fishing boats, and strode right up the mouth of the Dardanelles where he planted a foot on either bank.

"This is reminiscent of the legend of the Colossus of Rhodes, a giant bronze statue of the Greek god Helios, purported to have been built a century or two B.C. at about the same spot. Colossus supposedly was toppled over into the sea fifty-seven years after he was completed, by an earthquake.

"If there is anything to this obviously fantastic report we will know before long. International News Service planes are on their way there from Italy."

The commentator glanced off the screen again.

"The Helios Robot!" Sue whispered, her eyes round. "Then Aphrodite *did* manage to make it lift itself out of the mud!"

"Another report just came in that is immediately verifiable if the sky is clear," the commentator said. "Right now the Moon is just a thin crescent in the sky. The report says that flashes of white light can be

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seen by the naked eye in the dark portion of the Moon. They zoom outward in graceful arcs like the tail of a rocket."

The messenger appeared in the screen with another slip of paper. The commentator read it and smiled.

"This would be wonderful news, if true," he said respectfully. "It is a telegram from one of our leading religious figures. He urges me to read it over the air. Very well. This is what it says. 'God will not permit this race suicide to begin. Already there is evidence of His moves to prevent it from even starting. The lights on the Moon are positive proof of His coming.' That is the message."

The commentator laid the paper down, a twisted smile on his lips.

"I'm sure you all agree with me that such an intervention would be a wonderful thing at this time. However, we can't just sit back and hope it's true. We must work on the theory that war, ugly, destructive war is here. Tomorrow *you may not* be . . . so listen to the instructions and commands issued over the air continually from now on over this station. They may be the means of saving your life. Above all, STAY HOME. Don't run for the open country. If your house doesn't have a basement go to the nearest one that has. In an orderly manner move all your operations into the basement. Your cooking, your bedding. Then you will be below the first lethal radiation from an atom bomb if one happens to explode within a few miles of you . . ."

"Fred, this is Johnny, my brother."

"Hi, Johnny," Fred said, holding out his hand to the bug-eyed fourteen-year-old frozen in midstride in the kitchen doorway.

"Ha-ha ha-ha," Johnny laughed suddenly. His eyes darted up to Fred's face. "Oh—hello." He shook hands clumsily, turning his gaze back to Sue. "You made it just under the wire, I see, Sus—Sue."

"Oh no," Sue said, putting her arm half over his shoulder and digging a thumb in under his ear in gentle but painful warning for him to keep his trap shut. "We've been home a good half hour. But you'd better get in and wash up. Dinner's ready."

"Yes, hurry up," Mrs. Jones said, dumping the roast onto the large meat plate. "Wash up and then carry the chairs into the dining room. And don't take all day." She smiled toothily at Fred. "He's such a darling boy—but so slow."

"Stupid is the word, Mother," Mr. Jones said without looking up from his paper.

"Yah, I take after my old man," Johnny said.

"And have never caught up with him," Mr. Jones said, unperturbed. He chuckled. Johnny grinned at Fred and darted from the room.

"You can take the roast in now, Sue," Mrs. Jones said, turning her attention to the other kettles and pans of food.

"I'll take it in, Sue," Fred said, starting over to the stove eagerly.

"No, you sit down and take it easy."

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"Let him if he wants to," Mrs. Jones said spiritedly. "You set the silverware."

With an apologetic smile at Sue, Fred picked up the hot platter and carried it into the living room. The table had already been opened up and draped with a large linen cloth. As a concession to the war the extra leaf had been put in and all the places set on one side so that they could all watch the television.

"Be sure and stay tuned in," the commentator was saying for the tenth time, as Fred came in with Sue behind him. "The strange giant from the deep is a reality. At this very moment ships are speeding to relay points so that it can be brought right into your homes over this station . . ."

"I wonder what Aphrodite's plan is?" Sue whispered.

"What did she say again?" Fred asked. "I've been trying to think what she could possibly mean."

"She said Love was her only weapon." Sue said, "and that it could stop the war cold. But even you—I mean Mars—didn't know what she meant."

"I don't remember it much," Fred said. "He was so cold, so—inhuman. It paralyzed me when he took over."

"Aphrodite was—delicious," Sue said. She shivered ecstatically.

"I don't think I'd be afraid of her if she came back," Fred murmured slyly.

"She'd better not!" Sue said warningly.

"Fred!" Mrs. Jones called from the kitchen.

Fred winked at Sue.

"Coming, Mother!" he called.

"Don't call me Mother," Mrs. Jones said testily. "That obnoxious Carl Stillwell called me that all evening last night. You can take in the potatoes now." She turned her back to him.

". . . There has still been no move from either side in the war . . ."

Fred went back for the peas.

". . . war is still less than four hours old. It might be midnight before rocket bombs leaving Siberia could arrive . . ."

". . . rumored the President will speak to the Nation at eight-thirty."

"How about a kiss, Sue?"

"Mmmm."

"Look out!" Johnny shouted from the hall. "I'm bringing the chairs!"

"Ma, I wish you'd cut this meat in the kitchen," Mr. Jones said. "I'm too tired when I get home from work to—"

"Shut up, pa," Mrs. Jones said. "You've been objecting for twenty-two years now—and always cutting it."

"It will be on the screen very shortly now," the commentator said. "From all reports this literal reincarnation of the Colossus of Rhodes is more stupendous than anything the war can possibly bring out. It towers seven hundred and twenty-two feet in the air by actual measurement of instruments from the news helicopters hanging in the sky a safe distance from it. So far it has made no hostile move, even when one of the Russian fighter planes swooped down and raked it with machinegun

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fire.

"And that is another strange thing. There are no American warplanes here yet, but the Russians aren't paying any attention to our news helicopters and other craft in the air that are right now legitimate targets for them."

"Pa! Cut the meat!" Mrs. Jones said. "We'll tell you if anything happens. Well, here! Pass it to me. I'll cut it this once." She took the platter and carving tools from her grateful husband, adding under her breath, "Though I shouldn't."

And suddenly the commentator's face vanished from the screen, to be replaced by a sight so disproportionate as to be unbelievable even when seen.

Towering upward into the blue sky was the Colossus, legs widespread across a wide channel of blue water in which ocean-going ships floated, seeming toys in a tiny stream.

The dully glistening green surface of the monster was splotched with large patches of dull mud that still flowed perceptibly, dripping huge chunks that dropped into the Dardanelles to set up waves that rocked the ships there.

A plane appeared in the foreground for a brief moment, revealing Soviet markings on its wings as it banked into a turn.

"There it is," the commentator's voice sounded. "You will have noticed the Soviet fighter plane, one of the jet type. Right now it's very close to the monster. Those Russians seem trying to egg it into moving. That's Okay by us. We'd like to see it move too. What is it? Some fabulous living monster? A robot? In either case it's inexplicable. Science, *human* science of the past, so far as we know, could never have produced such a monster robot. As I watch it I'm inclined to believe it's alive, in some way. There seems to be something *alive* about it—even likeable. Notice the way its head is slightly tilted to one side and upward, as though listening, or waiting for something. Look! An arm is moving!"

And one of the enormous arms was indeed moving, the motion slow and deliberate as that of a giant crane, more chunks of ocean bottom mud sloughing off and dropping into the sea far below.

The entire giant body was moving, bending at the knees as the arms came up, the entire movement being unmistakably one of crouching defensiveness in gigantic slow motion.

A new voice sounded in place of the commentator's, growing and fading from the vast distance it traveled.

"Ladies and gentlemen," it said, "the Colossus seems to be expecting something. We know there are Russian planes on the way, nearly here. The fighter pilots have told us so over their radios. These new ships are equipped with the heavy machine cannons designed for attack on surface warships."

Almost too fast for the eye something small appeared in the screen, swooping down toward the giant figure. One of its arms shot out, the hand catching the thing and batting it to one side.

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Another and another swooped down.

"What's this!" the radio voice said, puzzled. "They aren't any type plane I've ever heard of. They have no wings. From their size they would barely hold an average man and have no room for anything else. Could they be from the Moon, where we saw those flashes? Are these what the Colossus was waiting for? There is a deep mystery—"

The original commentator's voice interrupted.

"We interrupt," he said, "to bring you a very special announcement just released from the White House. Washington and the Kremlin have just agreed to an immediate truce to join forces against this threat from space. None of us know what it is. We may be in for a more horrible war than that we were about to plunge into, so don't celebrate yet. We are still in a—"

"So that's what she meant!" Sue shouted, delighted.

"I don't get it," Fred said.

"Love!" Sue shouted. "Brotherly love!"

"Pipe down!" Johnny said.

"Ohhh," Sue moaned, her eyes wide at what she was seeing on the screen. "She's hurt."

One of the diving miniature ships had eluded the giant flailing hands to plunge into the chest, and through it as though it had been butter.

Something seemed to go wrong with the hands. Another evaded them and plunged through.

"We can hear the drone of a great number of planes approaching," the voice on the radio was saying. "It must be the Soviet fighter force. This is a ticklish situation. They are no longer our enemies, but our temporary allies. But do they know it? For *my* sake I hope so. The Colossus is going down! It's falling! No! It has staggered to one side and is trying to run, just like a wounded living man, but the little hornets from the Moon are diving into it—and now they have spotted the Soviet fighters and are attacking them too! It's too far away to make good televising but you can hear the roar of the Soviet machine cannons heralding the first interplanetary war for the human race.

"The Colossus is on its back. The wreckage under it is not blades of grass, but trees and houses, crushed under the thousands of tons of mass that is this giant from the depths of the ocean. All the Moon ships have turned their attention to the Soviet ships except one which you can see hovering above the Colossus. An arm rises feebly, trying to grasp the tormentor. And if that is not a human intelligence activating that giant, a *living* intelligence, then I will have to admit that intelligence is not the peculiar property of Man. But now the little ship darts away, and something is dropping toward the Colossus. It's—"

A blinding flash blotted out the scene.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the regular commentator came in, "something has happened. It must have been an explosion, though possibly the news plane was hit and destroyed. No,

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here is a radio connection with another plane—"

"The explosion," the new voice said, "utterly destroyed the Colossus, sending fragments thousands of feet into the air. It was an atomic explosion, a bomb dropped from that Moon fighter. It caught several news planes that were too close—"

"And here's a report from Washington," the regular commentator broke in. "The President has just announced that Russia and the United States have agreed to a permanent peace and the establishing of a combined air force, and agreed to immediate all-out attempts at space travel as soon as possible so as to meet the common enemy at its home base, the Moon . . ."

Fred shook his head sadly.

"Not much left of it," he said, looking up at Sue from the papers scattered over his desk. "After paying back that money I borrowed from the bank, and paying the income tax on the rest, we only have—" He looked down to read from his figures. "Three hundred and twenty-two thousand, four hundred and twelve dollars and twenty-one cents. And last week when we were eating lunch together here it was a couple of billions."

"Barely enough for a cheap honeymoon in the Ozarks," Sue said with deadpan sadness.

"Yeah," Fred said. "Quite a comedown. Say!" He fixed his attention on her hair. "Isn't your hair a little brighter? Or is it just the way the sun's shining on it."

"Do you want it brighter—like it was?" Sue asked. Her eyes were excited.

"Heck no," Fred said. "I want you the way you are naturally. I love you just as you are."

"Not even a little bit like I was?" Sue asked wistfully.

"Well . . . if it will make you happier," Fred said.

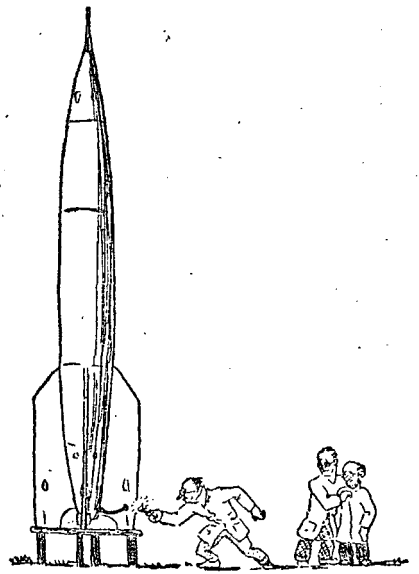
"All right," Sue whispered. "Make it just a little bit. Just a little . . ."

"What's going on here?" Fred demanded, alarmed. "Is Aphrodite back?"

Sue ran her fingers through her slightly luxuriant hair, feeling the life in it.

"No, Fred," she said. "Aphrodite isn't here." An almost regretful look crossed her face. "No, she's not here," she sighed. "She just left."

THE END



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LETTERS

(Continued from page 105)

stories have improved with each issue, and your covers have gotten better and better. The July cover is excellent, one of the best in the field. Of course I would like to see Paul do it, but even without him it's good.

One of the high spots in your recent issues has been the picture article on the inside covers. The one on Edgar Rice Burroughs is tops and worth the price of the magazine to me. I especially liked the reprint of the cover of All Story showing the illustration of the first Tarzan yarn. Such items are collectors' dreams. By all means keep this department up.

One point I must complain on, and that is the interior illustrations. They have not kept pace with the rest of the magazine. Bok, in the July issue, is excellent but it is the only good one in the issue. For the size of your mag the illustrations must be full page or they will not be clear. Keep Bok going, drop the rest, and bring in such top-notch boys as Paul, St. John, Finlay and Lawrence. With better interior illustrations your mag will be one of the tops of the fantasy field.

Keep up the good work.

137-03 32nd Ave.
Flushing, L. I., N. Y.

How does the Bok illustration in this issue suit you, Jimmy? And watch the first few issues of IMAGINATION for more of Bok and Finlay. We are planning a feature on St. John for the inside covers of one of the issues in the very near future, and there will be more such illustrated features to follow.

Don Wilson

You've made me happy enuf with OW to inspire me to subscribe. Awhile ago I decided to find out for myself if there *were* any magazines besides aSF, and after trying most of the major ones I decided that there is one worth getting—yours. Congratulations.

Didn't care for the cover. I prefer dark colored backgrounds to light, and cool colors to warm. Make the monster orange and the cave blue and I'd like it. I approve of placing the title of the lead story in the upper right corner. Likewise, the absence of excess lettering is good to see.

I suppose you'd have called "Colossus" a serial if you'd been monthly? While a little out of the line of stuff I usually like, this was the most impressive in the fourth issue. Byrne's main fault, I think, is a tendency to rush from place to place with insufficient care in tying the places into a coherent whole. Rog Graham has the same underlying fault in his writing. It seems to be a sort of skill that authors learn or else don't learn. Some authors who write at terrific speeds tie their stories up as neatly as those who plan them carefully. L. Ron Hubbard is one of these; note his "To The Stars" in aSF recently. But anyway "Colossus" carries along, and if it isn't strictly science-fiction, it reads, at least.

Nice to see you get Russell and van Vogt both in the same issue, even if neither were completely at their best. Of the other stories, I enjoyed "And All For One" best; I found Jones' story passable; and I couldn't see any reason for either "Edmund Latimer's Milking Machine" or "The Scissors." If you must feed us crap like that, you might as well quit.

Suggestion: Go monthly as quickly as possible, then start running novel-length serials. Suggestion again: Use the type of paper used in FATE and enlarge the number of pages.

I still like the overall tone of the magazine, and I like Ackerman's features, the editorial and the letter column. I suppose you'll have the bugs out of the mag soon . . . anyway I wish you the best. Keep them coming.

By the way, do Personals cost anything.

495 N. Third
Banning, Calif.

We're glad to welcome you to our family of subscribers, and we'll try our best to keep the good stories coming your way. The Personals Column is free—just send your notice in to IMAGINATION or OTHER WORLDS, or both.

Arthur Smith

The editorial in issue #2 made the prediction that by the sixth issue you would really be going places. I'm waiting, for if you can top #4 and #5, fandom can ask no more. However, (that word always crops up) I would appreciate more straight science-fiction over fantasy—the aSF type, please.

I am pleased to see that you are planning

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in analytical laboratory of some type. I ate #5 as follows:

ENCHANTED VILLAGE: Most enjoyable and will be remembered for a long ime.

JUSTICE OF MARTIN BRAND: Toward the end it dropped, but was well worth reading.

COLOSSUS II: Very good and nearly ied with MARTIN BRAND only every iow and then Byrne lost himself (or hould I have said Shaver).

WAY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE AIR: t was well written, I enjoyed it, but what was it? Surely not science-fiction or fanasy! Perhaps someday you will run short of copy and run a historical novel or an article telling how to build kites.

The two shorts were fine but I don't know where to rate them. WISHER TAKES ALL was the better of the two.

Enclosed find one filled-out subscription blank, and keep up the good work.

3117 Parkway Terrace Drive SE
Washington 20, D. C.

While not science-fiction, we feel that WAY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE AIR falls into the fantasy category. And you admit that it was well written and enjoyable. However, I think you'll find the accent on science-fiction in this issue. By the way, we assure you that Stuart J. Byrne is a real person, and not Richard Shaver in disguise.

Robert P. Hoskins

I just got your latest ish this evening so I haven't had time to read the two longer stories. I picked up three others at the time but decided that your story line-up was the best. That was unusual for included was one of my favorites—Startling. Just goes to show that you are improving every day.

Best of the shorter pieces is the Bradbury tale. You said in the last ish that it was written for Harper's. How come it ended up in *your* crummy mag? I'd think Harper's would be fools to pass up something like this. And surely they pay better rates than any pulp could ever hope to. So what did you do to Bradbury to make him turn it over to you? H-m-m-m?

VV's ENCHANTED VILLAGE is much better than the bit he did for you last time. WAR OF NERVES made me decide to never buy a copy of that book. Almost didn't read it this time. How's about getting him to turn out a long novel for you. One that fills up the complete book with the exception of a Bradbury short novelet. Those two would make an ish like that worth reading.

Looking back at the editorial of your May ish I find that you're modest when talking about your own stories, aren't you? You scintillating star, you. You also gave the Irwin tale a big play-up. Who is Peter Dexter? You or Roger P. Graham? His story a couple of ishes ago read like the ones you did under the Blade by-line in AS and FA.

When are you going to change the back cover? That ad for FATE has been on every issue so far. Maybe you could contrive to have some back cover paintings done by Paul or Finlay or Bok. And where is the front cover by Bok that you promised us sometime ago?

Keep it up and I may be able to convince myself that it will be worth while to take out a sub.

Lyons Falls, N. Y.

Sorry, but neither Mr. Graham nor myself can take the credit for being Peter Dexter. And as for Bok covers—take a look at the October IMAGINATION and the November OTHER WORLDS. There you are, two Bok covers—and more coming in the future.

Tom Covington

Thanks for the fine cover on the July edition of OW. Although not as good as that on the March issue it is very fine. Most of us fans were expecting it to be that promised Bok cover, but since we didn't get Bok, Smith will suffice. It's been a long time since we saw Bok on a mag and we're mighty impatient—so please use the Bok cover soon.

I have been trying to tell myself for a long time that I don't like blood-and-thunder. But strangely, I liked THE JUSTICE OF MARTIN BRAND. It was exciting. Maybe I should tell myself that I don't like *mediocre* blood-and-thunder.

Also, I don't like van Vogt usually 'cause I can't understand his science, but his story in the July issue was good. I only hope he will write some more like ENCHANTED VILLAGE for you.

The rest of the stories in the issue were

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only fair. I had expected Bradbury's to be excellent, but it was no better than his usual

I like the idea of printing stories under a thousand words. Ackerman's and Temple's stories were both cute, with Ackerman's a little bit the better.

Thanks a lot for the Personals column. I enjoy it almost as much as the letter section. OW is the first mag I've read which had such a feature. I think it is a great help and entertainment to us all. Thanks too, for the feature on Burroughs. It really is amazing to see a mag with so many features for fans.

315 Dawson St.
Wilmington, N. C.

Judging from the letters we've been receiving, the fans really are impatient when it comes to waiting for a Bok cover. However, when you see the November cover we think you'll agree that it's a treat worth waiting for. We're glad to hear that the many OW features are meeting with approval, and we'll keep them coming your way.

Herbert S. Ross

I am new to your magazine, but I am going to be a regular from now on.

I enjoyed all the stories in the July issue; the short-shorts pleased me especially well.

However, the story that made me sit down and write was WAY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE AIR, by Ray Bradbury. It isn't so much the fact that the Bradbury is one of my favorite story tellers that his story moved me so greatly. I haven't had a story reach me so completely since All Quiet on the Western Front.

I know that OW is devoted to presenting absorbing stories, and as you state in your laudable answer to D. Bugbee, beyond politics, but this story is to me the perfect statement of the case against discrimination. It also made me realize what we as a nation have almost lost, and might still lose if we do not take a firmer grip on our humanism.

Your answer to D. Bugbee's criticism of Colossus did my heart good. To my mind it was an excellent blow for the cause of clear-headediness and right thinking.

8 Blake Street
Mattapan 26, Mass.

When Ray Bradbury sold us WAY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE AIR he said that he considered it one of his best efforts; we read it and immediately agreed with him. It's gratifying that so many readers have written in upholding our judgment. So far we have received only one letter condemning the theme of the story. As to Mr. Bugbee's letter, we have heard from so many fans reiterating and adding to our comments on it that it would be impossible to print them all. It has more than convinced us that communism (or any other such -ism) will have little success in gathering followers from the ranks of stf fans.

Bill Margolis

OW, all five issues, have taken a fond spot on my bookshelf. But of #5 there are some bones to be picked—#5 because it's still fresh in my mind. Beware!—the violets and garlic herein are thoroughly mixed.

39,000 words by Irwin took up a few hours of my time which I think could have been much more enjoyably spent. Not that the story didn't hold me—it did, but it's just not up to par. Mr. Brand is not only unintelligent, as he is told by Jeffry Killian, he's an idiot! There were quite often much better—and safer—methods of getting the Martians than the thud and blunder methods of Brand. In most "literature" the main character either works upon his environment, or his environment works upon him, allowing the progression of the story. In "Justice" the reader is swooped into an impossible situation and then impossibly swooped out by the hand of Fate. (That's a fine mag, too.) Enough on thud and blunder.

Those two shorts were magnificent! Especially "Wisher Takes All." How does Temple manage to cram so much story into so few words?

When are you going to get van Vogt's first rate stories? I know he writes them—I've seen them in aSF. The birds and the living village are both quite fine, but vV can do much better. The latter story's outcome is becoming trite.

Colossus II is another thud and blunder, but this one I'll completely forgive. Especially after that letter printed about Colossus I. It's a fine story and I'm waiting for III. Rocky is another Martin Brand, the

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story jumps around quite a bit, it's a little frilled with all the "beautiful" wimmen—but I like it.

And now comes Bradbury. You are getting his first rate. He doesn't write any second rate. "Way in the Middle of the Air" is excellent. The story portrays quite accurately existing feelings in Samuel Teece. As an allegory, the story rates a place among any fine literature anyone cares to mention. 'Ray for Ray.

General stuff: OW size is perfect, clean edges admirable. Editorials fresh (like lettuce) and almost as good reading as the stories. Departments adequately filling readers' needs. Artwork can stand improvement but nevertheless of high quality considering other mags which say they are in the field—except aSF which still has you beat, but you're coming up so fast Campbell better watch. Inside art needs the most change, Smith covers are fine.

708 N. State St.
Chicago 10, Ill.

Well, you warned us in advance that there were both violets and garlic contained in your letter and while you were liberal with the garlic, you were equally generous with the violets so we have no cause for complaint. And it's a well-known fact that a little garlic adds flavor. The short-shorts have rated unanimous approval from the fans, and we're keeping our eyes open for more along the same line.

Edwin Sigler

Isn't it about time you let Bradbury go? He acts and writes as if his brain had been removed and replaced by a mixture of swamp mud and gutter slime. This latest story was particularly rancid for several reasons.

First, Bradbury depicts a type of Southerner that in all likelihood never existed.

Second, he pretends that Southerners constantly go out on lynching parties just to have something to do nights. This is absolutely false as lynching is very rare and only occurs when a negro has done something he shouldn't.

Third, he pretends that the negro is persecuted. This is also a lie built up by propaganda. The average negro is too lazy to take advantage of his opportunities, so he screams the persecution cry to cover up.

Fourth, even if some group could stand the cost of transporting all negros to Mars the blacks would not go. They have no pioneering desire and scream the persecution cry whenever the suggestion is made that they colonize.

The blacks are a slothful race. They do not want to stand on their own feet and amount to anything but want to live off the higher race and drag them down. Just keep an eye on their remarks in their own publications.

546 Ellis
Wichita 9, Kansas

The preceding letters by Bill Margolis and Herbert Ross are typical of the comments we have been receiving on Bradbury's story. In our reply to Ross we mentioned that we had received only one letter condemning the story. This is it. There are many arguments that could be presented to Mr. Sigler such as the fact that the type of Southerner portrayed by Samuel Teece does exist and has been pictured in the books of Margaret Mitchell and Erskine Caldwell, to name only two; that there are lynchings in our present time, as witnessed by accounts of the activities of the Ku Klux Klan (and who is to determine whether a person has 'done "something he shouldn't," thereby justifying lynchings, the courts or the Klan); and that people like Marian Anderson and Booker T. Washington could scarcely be called "slothful" and "too lazy to take advantage of his opportunities." But, as in the case of D. Bugbee, our faith in our readers is such that we feel sure that they have read the story in the spirit in which we published it. We felt that it was an entertaining, well-written story that cast light on a problem we all realize exists in our present time. Mr. Bradbury's solution is obviously not feasible—nor was it intended to be—but it does show that recognition of the problem is there, which of itself is a step in the right direction.

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